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A Note on Transliteration and the Use of Elipses in Poetry

Vowels: *a* *ā* *e* *ē* *i* *ī* *o* *ō* *u* *ū* *ai* *au*

Consonants:

<i>b</i>	b	<i>dal</i>	d	<i>ḡād</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡāf</i>	ḡ
<i>p</i>	p	<i>ḡāl</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡād</i>	ḡ	<i>lām</i>	l
<i>t</i>	t	<i>ḡāl</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡā'ḡ</i>	ḡ	<i>mīm</i>	m
<i>r</i>	r	<i>rē</i>	r	<i>ḡā'ḡ</i>	ḡ	<i>nān</i>	n/h
<i>z</i>	z	<i>rē</i>	r	<i>'aun</i>	'	<i>sā'ḡ</i>	s
<i>jīm</i>	j	<i>zē</i>	z	<i>ḡain</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡē</i>	h
<i>ḡ</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡē</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡē</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡā'al-</i>	h
						<i>mī ḡē</i>	
<i>ḡ</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡin</i>	s	<i>ḡāf</i>	q	<i>ḡē</i>	ḡ
<i>zē</i>	x	<i>ḡin</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡāf</i>	k	<i>ḡamza</i>	'

1. Word-final *h* is indicated only when it is pronounced, e.g., in *nigāh*, but not in *ḡapīda*.
2. *Iḡāfar* is indicated by adding *-e* to the first member of such compounds, e.g., *nigāh-e lālm-e surma-sā*.
3. The Arabic definite article is transliterated (-)al-, e.g., *ḡe'r-al-'Ajām*, *Nikāḡ-al-'ḡa'arā'*. Note, however, the transliteration of such common words as *ḡilkul* and *allāḡ*.
4. The *w* of conjunction is written *-o-*.
5. English rules of capitalization will be followed for proper names, titles of books, etc.
6. In a line of poetry, '[...]' indicates that the stanza continues on the next page; below a line, it indicates that a new stanza begins on the next page.

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This Issue of *The Annual*

NO MORE EXCUSES, no more delays. The transition is finally complete, and so we are able at long last to present the first issue of *The Annual of Urdu Studies* edited and published from the University of Wisconsin. We think our readership will be pleased with the contents of this issue; we have striven to maintain *The Annual's* reputation—a truly large concern, considering the amount of work Prof. C.M. Naim put into establishing it throughout the past decade. We thank him for providing us with the opportunity to follow up on his vision, and for the encouragement to try.

We mark *The Annual's* inaugural publication from Madison with some mixed emotions, commemorating the passing of two of Urdu literature's most prominent authors—Zamiruddin Ahmad, who passed away in London in December of 1990, and Ismat Chughtai, who passed away in Bombay in October of 1991. In their respective writings, each put an indelible stamp of artistic individuality and sophistication on the Urdu language, and all of Urdu humanities will suffer for their absence. Tahira Naqvi has contributed two translations of Ismat Chughtai's work, along with an introductory essay that outlines both her biography and the themes of her literary output. For Zamiruddin Ahmad, we present three translations of stories produced in the years before his death, when he resumed writing after a two-decade hiatus. Both authors certainly deserve the critical acclaim they have received over the years; our attempt here is to show the English-speaking world what they have to offer, and in so doing perhaps in some way to acknowledge the immensity of our loss.

Scholars of Urdu humanities may constitute a small segment of the general academic population, but they continue to produce wonderfully provocative and insightful work. David Lelyveld, D.J. Matthews, Geeta Patel, and Cada Petievich all have provided critical articles, and although we had not intended any set theme for this issue, it turns out that their articles mesh very nicely with each other: Lelyveld's and Matthew's deal

explicitly with the early linguistic, literary, and historical relationships between Dakani and Urdu; Potievich's is concerned with the poetic, cultural, and gender-based issues found in the form of early Dakani poetry known as *rekht*; and Patel's with the gender-based problematics of interpreting Miraji's name and biography.

Next comes a section devoted exclusively to translations of Urdu poetry. We are privileged to preview a selection of translations of several "postmodern" Urdu poets by Asif Farrukhi and Frances W. Pritchett, to appear (soon, we hope) under the title *An Evening of Caged Beasts*. Represented here are only six of the poets Farrukhi and Pritchett are currently working on; this taste makes us hope that their anthology will be *much* larger. As something of a contextualizing appendix to Geeta Patel's article, we include her translation of Miraji's long poem "An Evening on the Far Side of the Wine Glass." And to wrap up the poetry section, we have a brief poem of Zishan Sahil's, translated by Alamgir Hashmi. The poetry section is my favorite, and so I will offer a tip to anyone who might be inclined to listen: turn first to the poems of Zishan Sahil—you won't be disappointed.

Moving on to the review articles, Carlo Coppola takes us through Baidar Bakht and his associates' translations of five prominent Urdu poets, nicely providing some insights into both the poets' techniques and concerns, as well as the skill of the translators. Vinay Dharwadker writes an extended review of Muhammad Umar Memon's *The Tale of the Old Fisherman*, replete with structural, thematic, and historical insights into all of the short stories presented in this volume. Some of his observations (for example, his comparison of Abdullah Hussein's *The Tale of the Old Fisherman* with the fiction of Salman Rushdie) are extremely intriguing, and will no doubt surprise many of our readers. We get something of a double treat with C.M. Naim's review of Parveen Shakir's poetry, for not only does it include an analysis, but also some wonderful translations of her poetry. And finally we get two delightfully irreverent reviews by Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman, the first on the fiction of Abdul Halim Sharar, the second on what is reputed to be the first indigenous novel of South Asia, *Nitar*.

After a brief letter to the editor by Alamgir Hashmi on an article by Ralph Russell in *AUS* #6, we come to the book reviews—ten in all—touching on everything from how to learn Urdu in two weeks (!), to the poetry of Faiz, to the first issue of the journal *Pakistani Literature*. There should be something here for everybody concerned with issues surrounding the Urdu language.

Next we present an extended bibliography of recent publications related to Urdu humanities in the widest possible sense. It seeks to be as complete as possible, but in a very few instances some piece of information or other (e.g. number of pages, date of publication, price, etc.) was simply unavailable at the time we went to press.

We include a brief section on news and events germane to Urdu scholarship, and to cap off this issue of the *Annual*, we present for your enjoyment a deceptively simple, hauntingly beautiful poem by Zishan Sahil in Urdu—to remind ourselves that this is, after all, a journal devoted to Urdu.

Of course, a publication like this would simply be impossible without a sustaining readership. We enthusiastically request submissions of articles, translations, commentaries, and the like, as well as any reports of news and/or events pertaining generally to Urdu humanistic studies. Obviously, not everything is suitable for publication in the form in which we receive it, but we do examine all submissions in detail and strive to balance our critical impulses with a sense of fairness. We enjoy working *with* our readership, and encourage all to contribute. Submissions should be typed or stored on 3½-inch computer diskette (both Macintosh and IBM/compatible formats are fine).

The formalities now out of the way, we proudly present the inaugural issue of *The Annual of Urdu Studies* edited, assembled, and published in Madison. We truly hope you enjoy it.

G.A.C.

in memory of

Zamiruddin Ahmad

1925-1990



Ismat Chughtai

1915-1991

رنگِ گل و بوئے گل ہوتے ہیں ہوا دونوں
کیا قافلہ جاتا ہے تو بھی جو چلا چاہے
میر



Zamiruddin Ahmad

Sukhe Savan¹

SHE WOKE UP feeling embarrassed and sweaty. She quickly ran her fingers over her forehead, then her neck. Both were dry.

Through the door left ajar she looked out at the veranda shimmering with heat and light. She almost jumped out of bed, but realized it was Sunday. Languidly, then, she locked her hands and arched her arms, stretching them over her head. Then she extended one arm and unfastened the bedside window. A ferocious gust of hot air slapped her flush on the face. Outside in the alley, the sun lay stark naked. She was about to slam the window shut when the door of the house opposite hers opened. Out came the priest of the Juma Mosque, wearing a pair of *pejāmas* barely reaching down to his ankles, a *kurtā* and a skull cap, both of some coarse material. A thin, cotton towel, its two ends tucked firmly between his teeth, not only covered his head but also his temples and the nape of his neck. The priest started off toward the alley's corner.

He must be going to conduct the noon prayer—she thought as she closed the window.

Oh, no. She turned over to look at the clock ticking away on a side table by the headboard. What? Only eleven-thirty. Not very late. Still, I should be up and about now.

But she didn't get up. She stretched out on her back instead and started counting the beams in the ceiling, wondering why in this murderous heat she had decided to sleep inside the room and not out in the courtyard.

"Sukhē Savan," from his collection *Sukhē Savan* (Karachi: Dānyāl, 1991), pp. 13–31. Reprinted from Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., *The Colour of Nothingness: Modern Urdu Short Stories* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991), pp. 1–13.

¹Literally, "dry rainy seasons"; the rains, in the subcontinent, are associated with love, romance, and regeneration.

It was nearly two in the morning when I got back from the train station, that's why—she reasoned. If I'd slept in the open courtyard, the sun would have upset my sleep. Besides I didn't have to get up early today—did I?

Her eyes skidded off the sixth and last beam and travelled on down to her legs. Her loose *garara*, crumpled and bunched up in sleep, revealed a flashing calf, shapely and wheatecolored, spotted here and there with the remnants of coarse black hair. She ran her hand over the stubble and then pulled the *garara* leg a little ways farther up. The thigh was perfectly smooth and hairless. She bared the other leg. Again a hirsute calf but a perfectly hairless thigh. With a quick, nervous movement she pulled the *garara* back down to her ankles, just as she had quickly covered her head and breasts with her *dupatta* whenever she felt her father's presence.

Must shave!

She rolled over, belly down, and stretched her legs apart.

There was a knock at the front door. Bua will take care of it, she thought. There was another knock. That's when she remembered that the old maidservant had left for the day and wasn't expected back till late the next evening.

Hurriedly she got out of the bed, slipped on her *chappals*, and started off toward the front door. Midway she hesitated, turned around and went back over to the bed. She grabbed the *dupatta* from the headboard, threw it round her neck, and started back. She crossed the hot-as-hell veranda, and still hotter ditt courtyard, came to the door, peeped out through a rather wide crack and opened it.

Dulari, the sweeper woman walked in, a large round basket, with a stumpy broom handle jutting out of it, balanced on one of her ample, swaying hips. "Salam, Bibiji!" Dulari greeted her walking straight toward the latrine.

"Salam," she greeted back. Then she closed the door and went into the kitchen and put the kettle on.

"Dulari!" she called the sweeper woman from the kitchen.

"Yes, Bibiji!"

"Don't forget to wash with phenyl."

"I won't."

Dulari—what an apt name! the mistress of the house wondered. She really must have been a ravishing beauty in her prime. How fair her complexion still is. And what lovely eyes. She doesn't look like a sweeper woman at all. I wonder who told me that it was some nobleman—a Saiyid, to be precise—from Amanabad who had planted Dulari in her

mother's womb. Oh, it was him all right, it was her husband who had told her. She smiled.

She recalled how she'd split her sides laughing when he told her that back in those days Dulari went by the nickname "Platform" (for everyone jumped on without paying), how every neighborhood brat who attained puberty tried her out first. No, I'd laughed because of something else: he'd tickled me so. And he'd tickled me so because I'd teased him: "So did you hop on the platform too?" Oh, how he loved to tickle me!

"Ram Dulari!"

"Yes, Bibiji."

"Care for some tea?" And before the sweeper woman could speak her mind, she poured out some tea into a clay mug.

Dulari came over and installed herself in front of the kitchen door. "Sure, why not?"

She picked up the mug by its rim between her thumb and index finger and gave it to Dulari, ever so careful not to let her hand come in contact with any part of the sweeper woman's body.

Dulari sat down, resting her back against the portion of the kitchen wall still in shade and started slurping the steaming brew noisily.

She stretched her leg and pushed the small, low stool with lacquered red and yellow legs towards the kitchen door and sat down on it. "Any news?" she asked, pinching away from her ample bosom the gauze-like muslin shirt which the sweat had glued to her body, and took a sip of the tea.

"Who do you mean?" Dulari asked as she put her mug down on the floor.

"Ram Bharosay, who else?"

"What news could there be after so many days?" There was a note of despondence in the sweeper woman's voice. But the next moment saw her despondence change into palpable anger. "The wretch, he must be hiding inside the slut he's run off with."

But even this failed to appease the sweeper woman. So she thought up an especially coarse invective to hurl at her runaway husband.

"No, don't!" the mistress cried, but to no avail—she was too late.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Dulari said. She downed the remaining liquid in one giant gulp and got up. "I must go now, Bibiji. I still have to do a few more houses."

Dulari went back to the latrine, picked up her basket, balanced it deftly on her left hip, and started walking toward the front door. Suddenly she stopped and asked, "Has Birya left?"

"Yes."

"When will she visit next?"

"Who knows," she said walking Dulari toward the door.

She closed the front door behind the sweeper woman and returned to her room.

She did her usual chores—dusting and cleaning—then took a bath and changed into fresh clothes. She went into the kitchen and from the basket hanging from the door frame took out two *parāṭīs* and three kabobs, saved the previous evening from the meal packed for her daughter and son-in-law for their train ride. She ate the meal and topped it off with two drinks of water from the fawn-colored stone-pitcher. Then she went up the stairs into the *āsarāṭī*-portico.

It was sizzling hot inside the portico. Quickly she threw the windows—the one overlooking the back alley as well as the two facing the courtyard—wide open. The scorching wind, meeting with her sweat-soaked body, produced in it a sensation at once refreshingly cool and tickly. She began to hum, as her hands diligently and daintily returned the scattered objects to their familiar places. Finally she turned to the twin beds set in the middle of the portico. One had not been slept in at all, but the other looked a mess: the thin cotton rug that served as the mattress had become so bunched up that on one side it exposed part of the frame and cotton-tape mesh, and on the other side fell all the way down to the floor, dragging the bed sheet along. A thin, white sheet lay still folded at the foot of the bed; it hadn't been used. The embroidered pillow of the crumpled bed was where it should have been, but that of the other, also embroidered, had surreptitiously moved to the middle of its crumpled mate. The irregularity made her uneasy; so she grabbed the offending pillow and thumped it down where it belonged. But then, the very next moment, she was patting it ever so gently, as elders affectionately stroke children's heads. She arched her body over the messy bed for a closer look, felt satisfied, and began making it. Just then she noticed a rag way down under the bed. She reached in to pull it out with her foot, picked it up and examined it carefully. Oh!—she murmured, disposing of it in the small tin basket under the back window, in which two garlands of *brāṭā* flowers lay quietly withering away. She closed the window and, still humming, made her way downstairs.

That day there followed a stream of visitors and callers. Bua was the first and least expected; for she had herself said she wouldn't be back until

Monday evening. The old lady removed her *lador*, the wrap she wore when outdoors, dried her perspiring head and neck with it, lowered herself onto the foot of the bed, and made an attempt to explain why she'd been back early: because she was worried sick that "after the departure of Bitya and her groom, my poor, little darling would be feeling miserably lonely, crushed by the dreary emptiness of the house."

And then Bua literally assaulted her with question after question. In answer she told the old lady that "the train was late, a full hour. . . . Yes, it was very crowded. Still, the couple managed to get into a compartment. . . . The rush should probably have eased a little after Kasganj, and they might even have found seats."

"Poor children. They must've been awake the whole night."

"Not really. They went upstairs into the portico right after dinner . . . to catch some sleep." A glimmer of a smile danced in her eyes.

Now she asked Bua some questions of her own. And she was told that Fujloo, Bua's son-in-law, moaned and groaned the whole night long: the fever just wouldn't subside. What could she do? It was serious. So she had to take him to the doctor the next morning. "He diagnosed typhoid and gave some red mixture . . . charged a whole rupee. Trouble never comes alone! . . . Yes, the temperature's come down a bit. . . . A good-for-nothing son-in-law. What a fine time he's chosen to fall ill, when Shubratani is hugely pregnant and about to deliver . . ."

She laughed. Bua is the limit. Does she really think Fujloo himself prayed to Allah to fall ill? . . . Bua really shouldn't worry about the medical expenses. I'll take care of them . . . "Employed or not, at least there's a man about the house."

It was then that Bua told her she'd run into the vegetable vendor on her way back and decided to buy some vegetables. And since Adda Mian's shop was still open, she thought she might buy a couple of pounds of meat as well. "Fujloo'll be bed-ridden for Allah knows how long, so I thought I should do the shopping, or else you'd have nothing to eat."

"You did the right thing," she said, taking out her purse from under the pillow. "How much?"

"What's the hurry," Bua said, getting up from the bed.

But she insisted. Bua did some quick counting on her fingers: "Seven-and-a-half annas for the greens and four-and-a-half annas for the meat—a total of eleven annas. No, twelve."

She took out a rupee note and gave it to Bua. Bua undid the knot in the corner of her *lador*, removed a four-anna coin and gave it to her to settle their account. Then she picked up the *lador* and made for her dingy

little room at the opposite end of the courtyard.

Next came Bulaqi, the water-carrier's son, a red cloth tied around his waist, supporting a skin stuffed full of water on one of his hips and part of his back. She asked him from behind the door of her room why Khairati, the boy's father, hadn't bothered to deliver the water himself.

"Father's thrown his back," the boy explained, on his way out to the mosque to fill another skin.

"Why veil yourself from him?" Bua said. "The boy's barely the age of our Bitiya."

She disagreed. "Quite the contrary, looks like a fully grown man to me. Didn't you notice how tall and muscular he's become?"

The second time around the boy filled the bathroom tank and kitchen pitchers. Only after he'd left did Bua think she should have asked him for a third skin as well, to sprinkle on the scorched courtyard floor.

The mistress of the house was now standing in the courtyard freed from the oppressive sun, quietly cooling herself with a hand-held fan. "Looks like it's going to rain," she said, scanning the sky innocent of even a wisp of a cloud. Only now the leaves of the *pipal* tree in Lala Jivan's compound no longer clapped wildly, and a scrap of paper lay listlessly for some time at the foot of the pitcher-stand in the niche under the stairs.

"So what are you cooking?" she asked, leaning against a courtyard pillar from where she could clearly see inside the kitchen.

Bua, who was diligently kneading dough in a flat clay bowl, answered, "Meat-and-potato curry."

"Do make some *lapatis* for Shubraton and the kids as well. And yes, there are some kabobs left over from last evening, take those along too."

Bua gave her a look full of love and gratitude. "Shall I fix you some tea?" she asked.

"Yes," she said as she picked up the towel from the taxi—the low wooden settee—and made for the bathroom. "You put the kettle on. In the meantime I'll take a quick bath. It's so muggy."

When Puran, the flower vendor came along and sang out "*Bris* garlands!" she was still doing her hair. She stopped briefly and asked, "Bua, didn't you tell him?"

"I did."

"He must have forgotten then. Tell him again."

"All right, if you say so."

But Bua didn't tell Puran to stop delivering the garlands. Instead, she returned from the door with two strings of fragrant *masriya* buds—pearly white and barely opened. "Here," she offered.

"Oh for heaven's sake. What will I do with them?"

Bua's aging eyes perhaps failed to notice the change her offer had produced on her mistress' face. For if they had noticed, the old lady wouldn't have bothered to say, "Tie them round your hair-knot. They'll look nice."

She took the strings from Bua, who now returned to the kitchen, smelled their scent just once, and then nonchalantly threw them round the neck of the clay pitcher under the stairs.

When Suraiya came, she brought along a sweet, pungent smell that crowded and filled even the smallest space in the house. She put the basket filled with *rikazi* mangoes down on the *taxt* and explained that her father had brought the mangoes from "our Qaimganj orchard. He escorted me to the door. But he's already left. He's to see a lawyer. There's some urgent business."

In the meantime Bua, after closing the front door, returned. "It was Khan Sahib," she said. "He asked me to give you his greetings."

She intoned *salaikum*—the greeting back—and made for the sitting room with Suraiya in tow. There, she started giving the girl her lessons. Today's lesson included a *ghazal*. The girl listened attentively to her intricate explication of the different lines, but every now and then allowed her gaze to wander off to the older woman's face, fanning her own face once, then the teacher's, now with one hand, now with the other. When she came to the couplet

*There is no strength left for speech; and
even if there were,
With what hope could I really tell my
ardent wish*

she couldn't stand the girl's silently intent gaze upon her. "What's the matter? Why are you staring at me?"

Suraiya felt hugely embarrassed. The fan fell from her hand. She took the longest time picking it up. And then she said, rather timidly, "Miss, promise you won't be offended."

She felt speechless.

Then taking her silence for a yes, the girl mustered all her courage and in one fell swoop got out the words, "You really look very lovely today."

She blushed. Unable to decide quite what to say, she blurted out the first thing that came to her mind. "Stop. You shouldn't make fun of

your elders."

"Say what you will, Miss. Scold me as much as you want. But, by Allah, you do look very lovely today. Really. More than ever."

"All right, all right," she said, and resumed the lesson.

After the lesson both of them went out into the open courtyard. She instructed Bua to escort the girl back to her house. When Bua went into her room to fetch her *zaddar*, for the moment leaving teacher and student alone, she abruptly hugged the girl, stroked her head, and said, "Thanks for the mangoes."

The sun hadn't gone down yet, but neither was it visible any more; only the top of the *papal* in Lala Jivan's compound still shimmered in the day's last, amber light. The heat had relented, but it felt as oppressively close and humid as before. She pushed the *taxi* from the veranda into the open courtyard, sat down on it and let her feet dangle.

When Bua returned, she told her to get going before it got dark.

Bua, packing the food to take along, asked her if she would have her dinner now.

"No, I'm not hungry," she said. "And listen, I won't be back from school till three-thirty tomorrow; so don't bother to come before then." Then, as an afterthought, she added, "Take some mangoes for the children."

"These are from Khan Sahib's own orchard," Bua said, picking four of them from the basket.

"I know."

"He's a very nice man."

"That he is."

"And so smashingly handsome."

She made an inarticulate sound.

"His wife, too, was a very nice person. May God rest her soul in peace!"

"Yes."

"He wants to marry again."

"Oh," she smiled. "And just how do you know that?"

"Just now when I walked Suraiya back to her house, I went in to greet Khan Sahib's mother. She told me."

"So fix him up with somebody. What are you waiting for?"

After a moment's hesitation Bua let out the words, "For a certain

somebody to just say 'Yes'."

The younger woman realized that her joke had back-fired; the thorn intended for Bua had pricked her instead. She hurriedly got up and withdrew to the kitchen, returning promptly with a box of matches. Even though it was still not quite dark enough, she lit the lantern hanging from the arch of the veranda. She was about to go back to the kitchen to return the matches when Saen Baba's voice assaulted her ears. At the corner of the alley he was chanting in his deep, throaty voice:

*For when the gypsy moves his tent
Pride and glory and the rest
Will not avail nor all your best.²*

"He's mixed up his days! It isn't Thursday today, is it?"³ Bua mumbled as she got up and scooped up a bowlful of flour from the canister to give to the fakir as alms. As she was making for the door, the younger woman quickly took the bowl from Bua's hands.

"Blessed be those who give; blessed too be those who do not," chanted Saen Baba in front of the door.

The mistress of the house opened the door a crack and offered the bowl to the fakir. He emptied the contents in his own large, black begging bowl and returned the bowl to her. She nudged open the door a little further, and, still concealed behind it, asked, "Do you like mangoes, Baba?"

"Who doesn't, daughter?"

She went in and was back in no time with two ripe mangoes. She flung the door open all the way and emerged revealing all of herself to the full view of Saen Baba, the mangoes delicately balanced in her cupped palms. She offered them to the fakir, as if in tribute.

Trying his best not to look her in the face, Saen Baba picked up the mangoes with such disciplined self-control that his fingers didn't even brush her hands. He then blessed her and moved on ahead, chanting away in his low, bass voice.

Planted in the door frame she just kept looking for a while at how

²This translation of Nazir Akbarabadi's verses is by Ahmed Ali, for which, see his *The Golden Tradition, An Anthology of Urdu Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 187.

³Because Muslims consider it a religiously meritorious and auspicious day, beggars do their customary rounds on Thursday.

the fakir's broad shoulders, sturdy back, and tall frame mocked the alley's narrowness.

When she returned to the courtyard she found Bua sitting on the *soof* with the bundle of food set by her side. "You don't intend to spend the night here, do you?"

Bua grabbed her wrist and made her sit down beside her. Then she said, "I swear by the Holy Qur'an, my little darling, it was Khan Sahib's mother who brought it up."

Only half-understanding Bua's intentions, she said, somewhat confused, "Brought what up?"

Still clutching her wrist, Bua said, "She didn't actually say it, but she couldn't have been more explicit. She asked me to tell her if I had a suitable match for Khan Sahib in mind."

Gently she freed her wrist from Bua's grip and said very softly, "Must you torment me, Bua?"

Bua was genuinely hurt. "Torment you?—I, who raised you, cherished you? How can I? My little darling, I say what I say because I care for you. Because I can't see you suffer so."

"And yet you keep bringing it up. Time after time. You already know my answer, don't you? Now isn't that tormenting?"

"Back then I could understand your hesitation. You had Bitiya to worry about. Not anymore. She's happily married."

"Did I ever say she was a hindrance?"

"No, you didn't. But I'm not exactly a spring chicken either. I could see. I knew. I understand."

"As a matter of fact, you don't. Not at all."

"I may not be educated like you are, but I *do* understand. I know what it means to be a widow—I really do. I wasn't young when my husband died, but I wasn't old either. So you see, my darling, I do know."

"Well, then, why didn't you remarry yourself?"

"I'm sure I would have. Let's just say I wasn't lucky enough to find another man."

She burst out laughing. "Who could ever win an argument with you?" she said and looked at the almost darkened sky; the evening was falling over everything in a spray of fine mist. "You'd better be leaving now, or the *she-devil* at the cremation grounds will get in your way!"

It was the twelfth of the lunar month, the moon so full and bright it put the pale light of the lantern to shame. It was beginning to feel less and less

stuffy. Leaves were wildly clapping in Lalaji's *pipal*. A cool, moist gust of wind had removed the fan from her hand. A recalcitrant curl, escaping from her top-knot, dangled playfully over her cheek. Her soft, full body was spread out over the *taxi*, in a state midway between sleep and wakefulness.

A bolder gust of wind, saturated with moisture, came along: the lantern swayed, casting a maze of criss-crossing shadows on the veranda floor; the windows she had left open in the portico rattled; the little carved metal bowl lying upside-down over the clay flask tumbled a little sideways like a tilted hat; and she lifted the hem of her *kurtā* to wipe out the grit which the gust had swept up from the courtyard floor and sprinkled over her face. A bewitched moon luxuriated over the softness of her belly, planting kiss after impatient kiss, like a lover gone mad.

Somewhere far away lightning flashed amid the thunder-heads.

One, two, three . . . She counted up to fourteen. There was a second flash. She counted again. This time the thunder sounded at twelve, and the next time at only ten.

Oh, it's going to rain. And it's going to rain a lot—she thought to herself and sat up bolt upright on the *taxi*.

A stray translucent cloud passed over the moon.

She turned back to look eastward: a veritable army of clouds was on the march. Within minutes it covered the sky from end to end, throwing the entire earth into darkness. Lightning flashed again: the smallest object in the house leapt out of the cave of darkness into full, blinding light and withdrew just as quickly back into the cave's dark bowels.

But she didn't so much as stir from her place.

She recalled:

Aren't you afraid of lightning?

No.

That's something. Most women are so frightened they just about pee in their pants.

Tut-tut!

A few fat drops fell squarely on her smiling face. She heard the sound of many more fat drops pelt down on the *taxi* and the floor. She got up and went over into the veranda.

Rain was now coming down hard and in big round drops. Meeting with the parched earth it released a warm, raw fragrance that rose to her nostrils and permeated her whole being. She quickly put her reeling head against a pillar for support.

Lightning flashed again, revealing to her view bubbles in the

collected water that formed and burst almost in the same instant. She pulled her shirt-sleeve up to the elbow and stretched her hand out into the courtyard, like a beggar. The next instant her arm was drenched all the way to her elbow. She quickly pulled it back.

Her head still resting against the pillar, her glazed dreamy eyes watched and watched how the lightning leapt naked out of its mantle of clouds and then just as quickly crawled back into it, how the bubbles danced downstream, only to melt into water the next instant.

After some time she took down the lantern, lowered the flame, and went into her room.

Some ten minutes later she emerged, hesitant and cringing with modesty, exactly as she had come out of this very room a good two decades ago in the first days of her marriage: the hem of her *dupatta* drawn low over her face, shy and blushing, avoiding the glances of her parents-in-law; and her husband—seeing how she had diligently smoothed every crease in her dress, had disentangled every curl, and had searched for tell-tale marks on her neck and cheeks—he laughed noiselessly, his face buried in the pillow.

"What innocence. What naïveté!" he said. "As if Father and Mother have no idea what we're up to!"

Carefully she closed the door behind her and padded back noiselessly to the middle of the veranda, as if afraid someone might see her.

A gust of cold, moist air slapped her across her naked body, making it shiver.

The thunder had ceased and there was no more lightning, only the rain coming down in a gentle, noiseless drizzle.

Gingerly she set one foot into the courtyard, then the other.

The rain showered its pearl-strings over her upright, self-possessing neck, her proud breasts, her bashful back, her exulting hips. Her arms came together in an embrace across her firm bosom. She raised her face up to the overcast sky and closed her eyes. Her ears heard a report of thunder as she saw the flash from behind her closed eyelids. Just then she opened her eyes.

It was raining heavily again.

Suddenly her hands shot up as if of their own volition, and her feet began to whirl over the muddied ground: round and round, faster and faster and faster. Several times the lightning flashed, the thunder clapped to stop her, but her undaunted body paid not the slightest heed; it kept turning round and round in a mad waltz, till the clouds, walls, roof,

courtyard, veranda, pillars—everything began to whirl round with her.

She tottered, stumbled to the *taxi*, threw herself down on it, and covered her face with both hands.

The rain stopped, the clouds dispersed, and the moon came out again. The moon put a hand, full of caring warmth and tenderness, over her faint shoulders, as if to say: Get up now!

She slowly got up and made it to her room—disoriented, looking lost.

When she came back out a quarter of an hour later she was wearing the same *garāra* and *kurtā* she had on when she woke up that morning. She crossed the courtyard and started clambering up the stairs. But she stopped midway and climbed down again. She removed those flower strings of half-opened *mātiyā* buds, now a bit wet, from the water pitcher, went up the stairs, and came into the portico.

Then she gently tossed the flower strings into a heap by the pillow and facing them lay down on the same bed she had made around noon. But she took a very long time falling asleep.

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

Purvai—The Easterly Wind

THE BOY LIFTED HIS HEAD from the notebook and looked at the closed door behind which his father was changing his clothes.

"Father," he said, "what does *purvai* mean?"

The answer came from the kitchen instead, where his mother was frying *parāṭhā* for breakfast. "*Purvā'i*."

"The wind that blows in an easterly direction?"

"No," she answered, lifting the *parāṭhā* from the skillet and stacking it on the pile in the breadcloth, "rather, the wind that blows from the east."

"It's also called *parvegyā*—isn't it?"

The door opened. The father, buttoning up the front of his shirt, walked into the veranda where one three-legged chair and three perfectly good ones stood flanking a round table covered with a dusty plastic cover. A schoolbag lay open on the table before the boy who sat in one of the chairs, bent over a notebook on which he was writing something.

The father buttoned his right sleeve and asked, "What's this all about?"

"Oh, I've got to make a sentence."

"So have you made one?"

The boy gently pushed the notebook toward his father. The latter looked down at it and read out loud: "If the wind blows from the east, it's called *purvai*." After a pause he remarked, "But that's the meaning!"

"So?" the boy scratched his head.

In walked the mother holding a plate with a *parāṭhā* and a small serving of spiced scrambled eggs. She set the plate before the boy and said,

"*Purvā'i*," in *Nayā Daur*, Nos. 31–32 (n.d.), pp. 91–103. Reprinted from Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., *The Tale of the Old Fisherman: Contemporary Urdu Short Stories* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1991), pp. 35–44.

"Write!"

The boy promptly bowed his head over the notebook again.

"One of the effects of *parva* is that it cheers up even the saddest person, for a while at least, and . . ."

The boy lifted his eyes from the notebook and fixed them on his mother's face. She thought for some time and then said, "That'll do. Get rid of the 'and'!"

The boy dutifully struck out the word.

Meanwhile she quickly returned to the kitchen adjoining the veranda with its door opening into a small courtyard.

The boy shut the notebook, stuffed it into his schoolbag, and began hurriedly eating his breakfast. After he was done eating, he walked to the water-tank in the courtyard by the kitchen door and rinsed his mouth a few times. He dried his hands on a small towel hung on a clothesline in the courtyard, slung the schoolbag on his shoulder, and said, "Mother, I'll be late this evening. There's a field hockey match."

He then said goodbye to her, unlatched the courtyard door and scurried out.

Not long afterwards she returned with a plate: a couple of *parathas* and a small portion of some gravied meat dish left over from the previous evening. She put the plate before her husband, who was now ensconced in the same chair occupied earlier by the boy.

He stared at the plate. "No scrambled eggs for me?"

"There was just one egg," she answered, walking back to the kitchen. "I'll get some more in the evening, on my way home from work. Today's payday."

Back in the kitchen she sat down on the low wicker stool. She took out a piece of stale bread from the breadcloth, broke off a morsel, dipped it in the gravy left over in the pan, popped it into her mouth and started to slowly chew. After a couple of mouthfuls, she put the bread back into the cloth.

"Aren't you going to eat breakfast?" he called, mopping the plate clean with the last of his bread.

"Oh, I've already eaten," she replied from the kitchen, removing the pot from the stove and pouring the boiling water into the tea kettle.

"When?"

"While you were bathing."

He heard the sound of a spoon being twirled in a cup and asked, "You'll at least make me some tea, or . . . ?"

In response she promptly walked in with two cups neatly placed on

saucers. She put one down before him and the other before herself, then settled into an empty chair.

He took a sip of the steaming brew and absent-mindedly began to scratch at the plastic tablecloth with his fingernail, trying to take off the stubborn stain left there by lentil gravy.

She too took a sip and said, "Never mind, I'll clean it off."

They sipped their tea for a while. After some time he said, "This is the second day in a row that I've had to wear the same shirt."

"Oh well. The laundryman never shows up on time. We'll have to find another."

"But maybe a couple of shirts could be washed at home."

"Why not?" There was a sharp sound as the teacup hit the saucer. "The whole pile of dirty laundry could be washed at home."

He was stunned. "Now you're cross with me."

She didn't bother to respond.

He gently took her hand and began to caress it. But she pulled it away—quickly, brusquely. He rose and strode toward the back of her chair and installed himself behind her, so close that only the thin wooden back of the chair separated their bodies. He put his palms on her pale cheeks, stooped over her and kissed her matted hair. Then he raised his right finger and touched her gently across her firmly closed lips. Both his hands slid down along her loose hair, lingered awhile on her shoulders and then wandered slyly further down.

She drew back and sprang to her feet. "I have a lot of things to do . . ."

He snickered—out of embarrassment.

"I've got to do the dishes, make the beds, take a bath . . ."

He grabbed her shoulders and pressed on them to force her to sit down. Then he pulled over a chair, sat down in it facing her and said, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she said, fixing her gaze on her unadorned nails.

"Look at me!"

But she didn't; instead, she said, "This isn't the right time."

"And last night?"

"I had a headache."

He laughed. "You're a great one for making excuses." There was a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

She collected the teacups and started off for the kitchen. Her ample buttocks, swaying beneath the folds of her sari, touched off a wave of excitement throughout his body before they dissolved into the grey

darkness of the kitchen.

Just as she was stepping out of the store her eye fell on a chauffeur-driven car parking some distance away on the opposite side of the street. A man sat in the rear, his head resting comfortably against the back of the seat. She started. The chauffeur got out, walked back and opened the rear door. She quickly slipped behind a tree next to the sidewalk. A tallish man, with a slightly dark complexion, wearing a suit and tie and a pair of shiny shoes, got down. After exchanging a few words with the chauffeur he walked away from the car and entered into a nearby lane. The chauffeur returned to sit in the car.

Her throat constricted and went completely dry; her feet felt incredibly heavy; and she broke into a fine sweat. She felt as though her eyes were ready to pop out of their sockets and follow the man into the lane. She swallowed uneasily once or twice and nervously rubbed first her forehead and then her temples. She took the end of her sari lying over her shoulders and carefully covered her head with it and came out from behind the tree. She took a few hesitant steps toward the other side of the street, but faltered. She stood still, staring at the car vacantly for a few moments. Then she hastily crossed the street, walked up to the parked car, and stopped a couple of feet away from the chauffeur, unable to make up her mind whether she wanted to stop or move on ahead.

The chauffeur examined her from head to toe. Her grip on the shopping-bag tightened. She started to walk over, but then suddenly midway she did an about-face and began to walk away.

This time the chauffeur looked only at her face.

She turned around again and took a deep breath. Then she walked back to the car and asked the chauffeur, "Who was that gentleman?"

Her question had the casualness of one pedestrian asking another for the time or an address.

The chauffeur eyed her over again and replied, "He's our guest."

"Your guest?"

"Yes. I mean he's visiting my boss. He's from Pakistan."

She hesitated for a bit, then asked, "His name is Masrur Ahmad—isn't it?"

The chauffeur, who had meanwhile started to light a cigarette, blew out the match and tossed it out the window. It landed a few inches from her sandals.

"Don't know," he said. "The boss calls him Qazi-ji."

"Qazi Masrur Ahmad," she said, as if to herself "His full name is Qazi Masrur Ahmad."

"Could be," the driver said indifferently, and through the windshield he quickly fixed his gaze on the girl in tight clothes who was walking up ahead.

A car, driven by a young woman, passed by her. Another young woman sat next to the driver, her radiant hair blowing in the wind. The rear seat was occupied by a frail man and a portly woman.

She squashed the burnt match-stub with the tip of her sandal, opened the shopping bag, peered around in it, and, walking in a semicircle around the rear of the car, came to a clothes store and stopped in front of it. After a while she walked back to the chauffeur by the same route.

"He's brought his wife along too—hasn't he?" she asked, in the manner of a child asking for something nearly impossible to get.

The chauffeur looked at her as though she was crazy. He was apparently irritated at her for coming back and pestering him with yet another question. But, being basically a courteous man, he replied gently, "Wife! No. Qazi Sahib is still a bachelor."

She quickly thanked him. She turned around, cast a sweeping look down the lane and started off toward the bus station with soft, brisk feet.

When the father, carrying a bundle of files, came into the house, he found the boy at the table doing homework. He put the bundle on the table, sat down in a chair, looked around and asked, "Where's your mother?"

"Bathing."

He heard the sound of water splashing in the bathroom.

"This time of day?"

The boy didn't answer.

The plastic tablecloth suddenly caught the man's eye. It looked spotlessly clean and shiny. The floor in the veranda too looked immaculate, still slightly wet. Perhaps it's just been mopped—he thought. The courtyard floor also looked a bit wet here and there. The house had only three rooms, each with its door opening into the veranda. He looked at the first door, then at the second, and then at the third: each looked clean, thoroughly wiped, he speculated, with a duster. The same naked light bulb still hung directly above the table, still covered with its tenacious pile of dust, but somehow he felt it burnt much brighter today.

The sound of bathing ceased. Presently the door opened and she

emerged, wearing fully starched, light green *pajama*-trousers and a *kurtā*-shirt of the same color, with her wet hair wrapped up in a towel.

"It's late," she said, stopping by her husband. "I missed the six o'clock bus."

Waves of perfume wafted from her body. Her cheeks were flushed. The naked light bulb in the veranda seemed to have set off a whole array of tiny sparks in her eyes.

"Didn't you take a bath in the morning?" he asked, tearing his eyes away from the flashing pink of her cheeks.

"I couldn't. I was running late."

She proceeded toward the same door from which her husband had come out buttoning his shirt earlier in the morning.

"How about getting me a cup of tea?"

"Sure. But let me dry my hair first."

She went into the room. He yanked out a pack of cigarettes and a box of matches from his coat pocket, lit a cigarette and puffed on it.

In the meantime the boy finished his homework, picked up his school things and left for the middle room.

After the last drag the husband threw the cigarette butt down on the floor and squashed it with his shoe. Just as he was getting up, she came out of the room, her hair free of the towel now and spread loosely on her shoulders. The folds of her stiff, starched *dupatta* seemed to have frozen over her breasts. Holding the wet towel in her hand she walked to the courtyard and hung it on the clothesline.

She was about to step into the kitchen when the boy called, "Mother."

"Yes, Munna?"

"I'm hungry."

"All right."

"He hasn't eaten yet?" the father asked.

She shook her head.

"How come?"

"Oh, he had a cup of tea with some toast after he got home from school. He said he wasn't feeling very hungry."

The boy came in and said, "Mother, I want supper."

"Come on Munna. Don't be so impatient. Let me fix tea for your father. Then I'll feed you."

The boy returned to his room. As she was just stepping into the kitchen, her husband got up from his chair and said, "Never mind."

"Why?"

"Let's eat supper instead. I'm hungry too."

Sounds of banging pots and pans started to pour out of the kitchen. The boy turned on the radio. The father went into the room to change, then into the bathroom.

In the meantime, she set the table and brought out the food. "All right Munna," she called out, taking the middle chair, "dinner's on."

The boy turned off the radio and came into the veranda. His eyes fell on the platter set in the middle of the table. "Wow!" he let out a joyous cry, "Pilaf today!"

The husband had just dried his hands and mouth on the wet towel hanging on the clothesline in the courtyard and was back in the veranda. "Pilaf?" he said, somewhat surprised.

She held out the platter to him and said, "I got off from work a little early today; so I thought I might cook something special." She then offered him the bowl of spicy yogurt *ra'ita*.

He took a generous helping of the pilaf and poured some *ra'ita* on it. She served more than half of the remaining pilaf to the boy and dumped the rest on her plate, then pushed the *ra'ita* toward the boy. The boy took some and set the bowl before his mother.

"Very tasty," the husband remarked after the first mouthful.

"Yeah," the boy, his mouth full, chimed in.

She smiled.

After the supper dishes were cleared away, she went into the kitchen and promptly returned with a cardboard box which she set on the table.

"My, my, what a treat!" the husband exclaimed, opening the box. "What's the occasion? Did you get a raise or something?"

He picked up a *gulab-jaman* and popped it into his mouth.

"Oh no," she said, suddenly feeling a little embarrassed. "For days now Munna has been begging for sweets. So I thought I might just as well get some. That's all."

Then, looking at the boy, she said, "Have some."

The boy picked out a *laggû*. So did the father. But she took a square of *barfi*.

Presently the boy took a *gulab-jaman* but, before stuffing it into his mouth, said, "Mother, Siraj Sahib was telling us that the *puwa*? also has another effect . . ."

"I know," she said, very softly.

"And what's that?" the father asked.

"When it blows, it causes old hurts to start aching again. . . . Is that

really true?"

"Yes," she answered, again very softly.

"Have some more," her husband offered, holding the box.

"That's enough for me," she said.

A half hour or so later she went into the kitchen, but returned right away. "What's the rush?" she said. "I can always do the dishes in the morning."

"Yes," the husband, bent over a file, said, without lifting his head.

After some time she went into the boy's room. When she returned she said, settling back in her chair, "He's fast asleep."

"Yes," he nodded, again without bothering to lift his head.

After a while she got up and brought a magazine from her room and started reading it. But when he bent down to pick up a fresh file from the floor he looked at her out of the corner of his eye and realized that she really wasn't reading the magazine at all; instead, she was looking intently into the yawning darkness of the courtyard.

When he lifted his head again to light a cigarette, he found her reading the magazine. She looked at him over the magazine, smiled sweetly, and resumed her reading.

After a bit, she slapped the magazine shut and got up. "Well, I'm going to bed."

"You go on. I'll be there in a while."

She went into her room. The sound of her humming continued for a while, then the quiet was absolute.

The moist, thick darkness oozing down from the sky had covered the length of the courtyard; the noise of the traffic outside on the street had grown progressively fainter and ultimately died down; and the bark of a solitary dog arose somewhere far away. He decided it was time to turn in. He closed the last of the files and placed it on top of the pile, rubbed his groggy eyes, lit a cigarette and got up. He then turned off the veranda light, noiselessly pushed her door open and went in.

His eyes met their twin beds, headboards snug against the back wall. The small shaded lamp on the low side table lodged between the beds was still on, its dim glow barely reaching above their beds.

She was sleeping in the bed on the right; her clothes—the same *pajama-kurtā* suit and *dupatta* which only a few hours ago had sent a surge of excitement through him—and her bra lay all crumpled and bunched on the easy chair to the right of her bed. So unlike her!—he wondered, a trifle surprised. Wasn't she, after all, in the habit of neatly folding her clothes and putting them carefully away in the closet every time she

changed?

He edged closer to the bed and lifted the lightweight comforter pulled over her body all the way to her shoulders. He was stunned. Free of the last restraint of modesty, her sleeping body somehow seemed fully awake in anticipation of someone. He had the curious feeling that he didn't know that body, that he was looking at it for the first time ever.

He quickly stubbed out the cigarette and, ever so gently, noiselessly, sat down on the edge of her bed. She shifted; and her face, turned slightly toward the easy chair, straightened up and came directly under the lamp's subdued glow. Then, as he stood watching, a faint smile swept over her sealed lips.

He put one hand over the pillow cushioning her head and the other over the pillow lodged under her arm and lowered himself over her face. His parted lips stopped inches away from her closely pressed ones. It seemed as though her eyelids were moist. The vague suspicion was confirmed when he detected a wet spot on the pillow close by her head.

He straightened up, staring tensely for a while at her face and her breasts facing him. Then, ever so gently, he raised his index finger and touched her lips. Her breathing altered, so did the rhythm of her heaving chest. That faint smile abruptly departed from her lips. He held his breath and waited for a few moments. After her breathing returned to normal and the heaving in her chest subsided, he got up, taking the utmost care not to make the slightest sound. For the next few moments he stared vacantly at her body as it lay there comfortably stretched out, awash in its gentle, radiant heat.

Carefully he folded her clothes—her *kurti-pajama* suit, her *dupatta*, her bra—and put them neatly on the easy chair before retiring to his bed. He sat on it for quite a while.

She turned over in bed. Her face was now turned toward him. A smile—the sign of some rich, honeyed dream—was spilling from her lips and the corners of her eyes, bringing to the fresh pink of her cheeks a more vibrant color. The other pillow was hugged tight to her bosom.

He stretched out his arm and pulled the comforter over her nakedness. Then he turned off the lamp and went to sleep.

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

Damnation

A HALF-HOUR EARLIER, the color of the baby booty had been pale sky-blue; now it appeared to Meher dark grey. There it was: tiny, still on the needles, unfinished, lying next to the knitting bag on the table in front of the open window. Her gaze moved from the booty and ascended to the sky, which had been cast in twilight for some time but was not yet completely dark. Looking at the sky framed by the open window, she imagined that the rising smoke was a twisting dragon winding its way upward from the ground. She was lying in bed half-seated, propped up by two pillows against the headboard. Straightening herself, she sat up completely and once again fixed her gaze on that portion of the sky where the twisting dragon showed itself. *Not The sky is clear. I was only seeing things. The night before last, just over there, first the rising smoke and then the flames, you could see it so clearly from here. Tich however had said that the fire must be a couple of miles away.*

If only for a brief moment a faint smile had tried to make its way to his lips, only to disappear.

Won't you ever stop calling me 'Tich'?

Never!

And if I were to start calling you 'Fatty,' then?

I'm not a fatty. I'm not fat anywhere.

Shall I tell you the place where? Or rather, the places?

Tell! And when Shaukat told her by reaching for her, Meher stopped his hands with both of hers, and sitting herself down in his lap gestured like a cop directing traffic . . . But the vanished smile didn't return to his lips.

Again supporting herself against the headboard, Meher lay back half-way, and her eyes again fell upon the half-knitted booty which had

¹"Patil," in *Naya Daur*, Nos. 85-86 (n.d.), pp. 113-139.

by now turned completely dark. She tried to recall just when she had begun the booties, but she couldn't remember for sure. —It had been a long time, she decided. She got up and put the booty and needles in the knitting bag.

When Meher turned she saw that Pathani was leaning against the frame of the door that opened out onto the portico. "Shall I turn on the light?" she asked.

"Sure."

Pathani felt for the switch and turned it on. Meher blinked her eyes a few times and sat down in the easy chair near the open window next to the bed.

"Come on in."

Pathani entered the room and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Shaukat Mian isn't home yet?"

Meher knew that Pathani knew very well that "Shaukat Mian" wasn't home yet, but she said anyway, "No, not yet."

"He must be on his way."

"Yes, he must be."

Pathani came over to the chair and squatted down on her haunches. Resting her right elbow on her right knee, she supported her right cheek in the palm of her right hand and said, "You should lie down, Bitya."

"I will."

"The lady-doctor said you shouldn't sit."

"I know. But I can't stay lying down all the time."

Pathani pretended not to hear. "It's already happened once. That's why she told you to be so careful."

"I am being careful."

Meher herself heard the irritation in her voice. She felt contrite.

"Haven't I been lying down all these days?"

Pathani remained silent, and this deepened Meher's remorse. She became angry with herself. *Why did I have to take it out on her? And especially now, with the troubles she has.* She felt like crying at the top of her lungs. Just scream. She got up from the chair and went to lie down. But before she got into bed she cast her eyes downward and said, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

Pathani caught a glimmer of the pain that lay concealed behind her apology. She became unsettled deep inside, and scolded her very affectionately.

"Don't be silly, Bitya."

And supporting the other elbow on the other knee, she rested the other cheek in the palm of her other hand and changed the subject. "Why don't you have a glass of milk? Today too you haven't eaten anything all afternoon."

"No thanks."

"Or if there's anything else you feel like eating . . ."

For the past few days Meher had had a craving for *gôl gappâs*. But this was not the time. In these circumstances just the thought of requesting something for herself became an occasion for remorse. *If someone were to know, what would they think!* Quickly, she replied, "No, I don't think so."

Pathani put both of her hands on her knees and was about to get up when, from somewhere in the distance, the stillness was rent by the sound of gunfire. She sat down again and Meher closed her eyes. They both felt like stuffing their fingers in their ears, but really they were both listening, anticipating more. But the firing was over as quickly as it had begun. Pathani muttered something, and Meher heard her and opened her eyes. Her eyes fell on the vanity which, instead of being in the dressing area off the bathroom, was placed near the foot of the bed. The entire bed was visible in its large mirror. Seeing the reflection of her stretched-out body her mind briefly wandered off somewhere; she snapped out of it and reproved herself.

As she passed in front of the table on her way out, Pathani stopped at the framed picture standing near its edge. It was a picture of a young man with a conspicuous smile, a smile that possessed his entire face. Pathani looked at it, her eyes filled with a combination of love, faith, pain, and sorrow. A sound escaped her lips, the same sound most women like her make when overtaken by terribly bad news, their right hands rising in alarm to their chests. She bent over and wiped clean the entire picture with the end of her *dupatta*, taking care neither to crack the glass nor to somehow wipe off the smile. When she moved toward the door, Meher said, "Could I have that picture, please?"

Pathani picked the picture up from the table and gave it to her. Meher, lying back as she had been earlier, opened the drawer near the head of the bed and, avoiding the gaze of the smiling young man, slowly placed the picture inside the drawer and closed it.

"He asked me to move the picture somewhere else."

Pathani at first didn't understand why "Shaukat Mian" would want such a thing. Instead of leaving the room she sat down on the bed near Meher's feet. Then, like a lightning bolt, the reason flashed into her

mind, and in its light she began to see the situation clearly.

"It's one of His mysteries," she said, thrusting her index finger skyward. "God only knows! He gave me two, He took both away."

Pathani had the impression that hearing yet again the tired old news of the loss of her sons had brought a shiver to Meher's body. Raising Meher's feet, Pathani placed them in her lap and began to gently massage her calves. Meher tried, but Pathani wouldn't let her withdraw her feet.

"Today Shaukat Mian must have met with Khan Sahib."

Meher couldn't decide if this was meant to be a question or not. And if it was, then for whom—Meher or Pathani herself? Or had she just spoken what was going through her mind? In any event, hearing Pathani's words was like having a great burden removed from her chest. *We've at least managed to cross this bridge. Or we're soon about to.* Meher's heart told her that this was the reason Pathani was spending so much time hovering around her room—to find out whether or not Shaukat had met with her husband and seen how he was faring. She had come up a couple of times during the day, too, with this especially in mind. There was no other reason. But since Meher had not opened her eyes even after she heard her coming, Pathani took Meher to be asleep and so returned downstairs. She pretended to be sleeping because she thought it best for Pathani to ask Shaukat himself about her husband's welfare. And besides, what did Meher know anyway! Had Pathani asked, what could she have told her? But now that the old woman had broached the issue, Meher would have to say something. She responded, "Yes, he did say something to that effect."

"He mentioned it to me too as he was leaving."

When Pathani said nothing more, Meher thought, *Okay, that's the end of it*, and quickly removed her feet from Pathani's thighs. But Pathani remained silent for only a moment.

"It's been four days."

"Yes."

Pathani became silent again. She was thinking, *Shall I say it or not?* Finally, she said it: "He hasn't come over since after the funeral."

Meher was afraid she would go off again, repeating everything. But Pathani said only this: "He told me he would come again the next day."

Meher blurted out the first thing that came to her mind. "Maybe he isn't feeling well."

"Who? Khan Sahib? No, Bitya! He's never been sick a day in his life! Look how old he's gotten! Why, he's never even had so much as a head cold! Believe me!"

"The roads are closed these days. That must be holding him back. And besides, the transportation . . ."

Pathani didn't think Mehet's point was worth finishing. "Transportation? That's a good one, Bitiya! You think he needs some kind of transportation to get here?"

Mehet really did think so, so she said: "Yes. It seems to make sense."

"Perish the thought! He comes on foot!"

"He's very courageous."

Mehet felt Pathani swell with pride at hearing this praise for her husband.

"When is he ever at home? He's forever going out. He comes back only after he's walked for miles."

"Is that so?"

"Absolutely."

Pathani became quiet, and Mehet thought, *Okay, good, that's eased her heart a bit.* But in a short while a different Pathani said from somewhere else, "Since yesterday I've been having such terrible thoughts. I don't know why . . ."

Mehet sat up, reached over and put a hand on Pathani's knee, and said, "Why worry yourself needlessly? Shaukat will be here soon."

A few minutes later there was the sound of a car pulling up outside.

Pathani peered out the open window and informed Mehet, "Shaukat Mian is here." But when a few minutes had passed and he still hadn't come up, Pathani went downstairs saying, "I'll go put a kettle on. Maybe Shaukat Mian will want some tea."

And when Shaukat did come upstairs, it looked to Mehet like shadows were hovering about his gaunt face. She saw him take his keys out of his pants pocket. He was about to put them on the dressing table, just where the picture had been, but he stopped. He turned his head and looked over toward her, but she gave no answer to his silent question. Shaukat put the keys back in his pocket and anxiously sat down in the easy chair. Supporting himself with both his hands, he began to stare at the floor. Mehet waited for a bit and then asked, "You stopped downstairs?"

Shaukat raised his head to look at her, and for several moments kept looking at her, silently.

"I ran into Siddiqi Sahib's wife."

Mehet waited, but when he didn't continue she spoke up. "She came up this afternoon. She said she was waiting for him. I told her we

wouldn't let her go until Siddiqi Sahib's completely recovered. She just broke into tears. Poor thing."

"Just now she was crying too." Again, he began to stare at the floor. "Siddiqi Sahib's in a bad way." Then he said in English, "I think they'll have to amputate his leg."

"Why?"

"Gangrene. His room smells of it. And he was looking at me like I posed some kind of danger to him. I don't know if he even recognized me or not. When I offered my *salām* he just mumbled something and then said nothing."

"His wife was saying he can't sleep. When he does manage to doze off, he gets agitated in a matter of minutes and sits bolt upright in the bed. And then the same screaming starts all over again."

"All his children, right before his eyes . . ." The next word caught in Shaukat's throat.

"Shall I make some tea for you, Mian?"

Shaukat raised his eyes; Pathani was standing in the doorway.

"No thanks."

"Come now, have some tea, won't you?"

"Sure, why don't you," Meher sided with Pathani.

"I had some at work. Have you had any?"

"No, I just don't feel like it. Did you have anything to eat today?"

"Yes."

Meher thought better of asking him for the particulars—*where did you go, what did you have*. He was sure to ask her the same thing, sure to point out that she too had eaten nothing. She had already come up with her answer, but Shaukat remained silent. And Meher was taken aback.

Pathani had until just now been standing in the doorway, but when the phone rang in the next room and Shaukat got up to answer it, she quietly went downstairs. When Shaukat was through with the phone, he came back into the room but didn't tell Meher who had called. He just sat down next to her bed. Meher again found cause to be taken aback—this was not like Shaukat at all. She slowly reached out and drew his head to her shoulder. She asked who had been on the phone, and Shaukat answered absently, as though something long forgotten had suddenly come to mind.

"It was him . . . Kalimullah."

"But they've gone to Islamabad already."

"He had to stay and sign some papers or other for the house. He's going back tomorrow." Shaukat was silent for several moments. "He only

found out about it when he got here . . . "; he left the matter hanging. And after more silence he said, "He wanted to come . . . to offer his condolences. I wouldn't let him."

Meher was again taken aback. "You wouldn't let him?"

"It amounted to as much. I told him this was hardly the time."

Shaukat got up and began to pace. Having made his way back and forth a few times he stopped abruptly and said, "I stopped at the cemetery on my way home. That's why I'm late."

"I was just about to ask."

"It looked like a carnival there. I've never seen so many people in a cemetery before. Maybe you should come along one of these days."

With this Meher felt like her heart had been mercilessly wrung by some great stern hand. She sat upright in her bed. Taking Shaukat's hand and sitting him down next to her, she said, "Why don't you lie down for a little while?"

Shaukat lay down and began to stare at the ceiling. Meher searched his pants pockets and took out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. She lit one for him, took a drag, and put it between his lips. Eyes closed, he smoked the cigarette, tapping the ashes on the floor. She looked now at him, now the burning tip, now again at the ashtray lying nearby on the table. She just knew it wouldn't be appropriate to get it for him. Shaukat opened his eyes. He glanced at the cigarette, which was half gone. He rolled over onto his side, his back to Meher. He reached out his hand and stubbed out the cigarette, and with his index finger he began to trace random forms in the scattered ashes on the floor.

"Have you eaten anything?"

Meher answered his question. She was thinking that his response would be something like "That's not eating," that he would drive the point home, like when he left for the office in the morning, by reminding her how Dr. Sitara had stressed the need for a wholesome and complete diet. But Shaukat didn't say a thing. Not one word. Positive or negative, not a single sound came from his mouth. And the consternation that accompanied her amazement grew even more intense. She couldn't shake the intensity of her dismay, and so just kept stroking Shaukat's hair. Finally she said, "Why don't you change your clothes."

"Sure."

But he didn't get up. He just kept staring at the ashes on the floor. Suddenly he turned over onto his other side, facing Meher, and said, "I went to Pathani's house today—there's a curfew there as well. I had a hard time getting permission . . ."

He got up, leaving this hanging as well. Meher thought he was going to change his clothes and then pick up the story, but he wasn't headed toward the dressing area. Instead he closed the door, bolted the latch, and came back and sat down next to her.

"There's nothing left there anymore," he began, trying to maintain his equanimity. "Nothing but burned-out houses. No one knows who's alive and who's dead. All I could find out was that they've found several corpses. Some burned beyond recognition." He stopped. "Animals!"

Meher shut her eyes tightly. Resting her head on her knees, she kept listening to the rise and fall of Shaukat's voice—which hospitals and morgues he had gone to, how many dead bodies he had seen, how many wounded, how he had seen several corpses so disfigured that even their own families would likely be unable to recognize them. But of those bodies which were recognizable, there was none he might even have vaguely suspected as Khan Sahib's—although there was one military man who told him that a body had been found in Pathani's house. Meher was overcome by a chill that left her entire body trembling. She opened her eyes. Shaukat was sitting with his head hung low.

"So what do we do?"

It took Shaukat a while to understand her question. When he finally did understand, he said, "We'll just have to tell her."

"I suppose so."

"You should tell her."

"Me?!" She recoiled like people do when they see a snake or a scorpion a few paces ahead of them. "No! I will not be the one to tell her!"

Shaukat acted as though he expected just such an answer. He said, "All right then, I'll tell her myself."

He went into the dressing area and returned wearing his *kurtajama*. He paced again for a short while, and then went and stood in front of the open window. The scarred moon, pasted like a *bindi* on the forehead of the open sky, became the focus of his attention.

"Did you bring my medicine?" Meher asked.

"Your medicine!" Shaukat said, returning from somewhere very far away. "Yes. I did."

Meher waited for a moment, but when Shaukat didn't move she said, "Could I have it? It's time for my evening dosage."

Shaukat went outside. Meher heard him call Pathani, asking her to bring a glass of warm milk. "You shouldn't take your medicine on an empty stomach," he said as he came back into the room.

"I'll take it with water," she said. "I don't feel like any milk. It makes me nauseous. For the past few days, I've just been taking it with water."

"I see. But you haven't eaten a thing. You should put something in your stomach."

Meher became silent. Several minutes later Pathani came carrying a glass of milk and a mug of tea on a small black tray. She gave the milk to Meher first, and then offered the tray to Shaukat. He looked at Pathani's face. Pathani said to him, "Drink the tea, Mian."

Shaukat said nothing and took the mug.

"Would you please get my medicine?" Meher asked.

Shaukat went into the dressing area and returned with two pills. Meher reached out her hand and Shaukat placed the pills in her palm. Meher cast an inquiring glance at them.

"Sitara changed the medication," he said. "The other was too hard to get."

Meher put one of the pills in her mouth. She drank two swallows of milk, put the other pill in her mouth, and took some more milk. Then the rest of the milk, her eyes closed and with a deep breath, as people do with bitter medicine. She gave the empty glass back to Pathani who was standing with the tray next to the bed.

Shaukat was sitting on the edge of the easy chair slowly sipping his tea. He said to Meher, "Why don't you lie down now."

When Meher had lay down Shaukat took another swallow of tea, and then offered the mug back to Pathani. She came over to the easy chair, took the mug from his hand and poured inside. It was half full.

"I really don't feel like any tea."

Pathani turned to leave.

"Just a second. . . ."

Pathani stopped.

"God knows I tried, but I couldn't go today. I had no time."

Meher quickly rolled onto her side, turning away from Pathani.

"I'll definitely go tomorrow. All the same, I did make some inquiries. It's all quiet there."

Meher shut her eyes.

"If it's possible, I'd like to go with you, Mian."

"Certainly."

Pathani left, and Meher opened her eyes. "What did you just do?"

"I don't know." His head felt like several drills were boring into it. He rested it on the back of the easy chair.

Much later, after Shaukat had asked Meher if the milk had made her nauseous, and she had responded that it hadn't, after Meher had told him that whether he was hungry or not he should still eat something, and he had ignored her, after he had smoked three cigarettes one after another, after utter silence had descended and receded who knows how many times, after Shaukat had seen Meher slowly sink into the river of sleep and had switched off the ceiling light and switched on the thick-shaded table lamp, Meher turned in her sleep and a moan escaped from her lips. A short while later, she moaned again, but this time her eyes opened, and she saw that Shaukat was leaning over her.

"What's the matter?"

"It hurts."

"Where?"

She took his hand and placed it on her abdomen where she felt the pain. "Here."

Very soon the pain became severe. Meher tossed and turned. She bit her lower lip and pressed her abdomen with both her hands. All at once she seemed to go into a daze. A shadow of fear began to spread across her face. She sat up, timidly put her left hand between her thighs and touched her white *salwar*. With her other hand she quickly raised the bottom of her *qamis*. She looked in horror and screamed, "I'm bleeding! Shaukat!"

Meher got up and began to go into the bathroom, but Shaukat took her by the shoulders and laid her back down. He covered her legs with a blanket and then brought some towels from the dressing area. Searching for the knot he untied her *salwar* and removed it; he folded a thick towel and placed it beneath her. After he had bolted to the next room and phoned Dr. Sitara, he came back and sat down on the edge of the bed next to Meher. He took her hand in both of his and told her that the doctor was on her way.

When the doctor arrived, Pathani and Siddiqi Sahib's wife came upstairs right behind her, but they stopped in the portico outside the room. After she had thoroughly examined Meher, the doctor told Shaukat that Meher had already had a miscarriage. She probed around with some questions, to which Shaukat gave some outwardly satisfactory answers, but he could tell by her face that she was not completely convinced. She said nothing about it, however. When the bleeding had just about stopped, all she said was that she would return in the morning to clean Meher up, that now it wasn't possible.

After the doctor had left, Shaukat and Meher saw that Pathani and

Siddiqi Sahib's wife were both crying. With a wave of her hand, Meher called them over to her. By turns both sat down next to her and stroked her head. Siddiqi Sahib's wife recited some prayers and blew on her auspiciously, and in a short while returned downstairs. But Parhani was insistent that she remain at "Birya's" side all night. Only when Shaukat had explained to her that the danger had passed did she agree to leave, and only then on the condition that they let her stay in the next room, so that should the need arise, she could be called immediately.

When Parhani had left, Shaukat shut the door and sat down by Meher's side. She lay flat on her back. Her chest was gently rising and falling, and her eyes were closed. She wasn't crying now, but her eyelashes were still moist. Without opening her eyes she reached her hand out to Shaukat. He put his hand in hers, which she first put against her cheek and then to her chest. Shaukat felt the burning in his eyes, felt it want to become tears. He seized her hand and pressed his lips to it, then placed his head on the back of it. The burning did become tears, and they flowed from his eyes in streams. Meher opened her eyes, and for a while she felt the burning of the silent liquid dripping onto the back of her hand. Very gently she removed her hand from under his head and stroked his dishevelled hair a few times. She said in English, "I understand, Shaukat."

And she too began to sob.

—*Translated by G.A. Chauhan*



Ismat Chugbani

Ismat Chughtai—A Tribute

"The wretch turned out to be a total woman!"

—SA'ADAT HASAN MANTO, *Ganj-e-Farid*

SHE DIED AS SHE HAD LIVED, in the midst of controversy, doing her own thing. The news that she had left instructions she was to be cremated became cause for heated debate in both India and Pakistan and even those who knew her, who expected her to be unpredictable, were taken by surprise. But the furor over funeral rites could not divert attention from Ismat Chughtai the artist. Her greatness as the grand dame of Urdu fiction, as one of the four pillars of modern Urdu short story (the other three being Manto, Krishan Chander, and Rajinder Singh Bedi), as the indomitable spirit of the Urdu *afāna*, the last chronicler of the Uttar Pradesh Muslim culture and its associated semantics, was affirmed again and again in tributes by old friends and contemporaries, new and young writers, journalists, and critics.

The importance of Ismat Apa's craft and the skillful manner in which she approached it cannot be minimized, nor can her role as an innovator and revolutionary in the area of fiction. She was a writer (and a good one at that) when women were discouraged from involving themselves in intellectual pursuits; she developed the markings of a feminist in the early forties when the concept of feminism was in its nascent stage, even in the West; she spoke her mind unreservedly; she was afraid of no one, nothing; she was a rebel. But one tends to forget that she was more than all this. I hope she will be remembered best, especially by people like myself who see Urdu faltering and enervated, as a woman writer whose work is a living document of traditional linguistic patterns, in all their colloquial, idiomatic and dialectal richness.

Many of Ismat's critics, past and present, lament her single-minded

preoccupation with women's lives, with a middle class society and its concerns, what they deem to be her myopic view of the world. I agree that there was much more out there in the villages and towns of India and Pakistan that Ismat Apa could have utilized to enhance her subject matter and the narrative texture of her stories, but if she had branched out and experimented with other themes and approaches, she would probably have lost that very special touch that sets her apart from all other writers of Urdu fiction. The reason for this might lie in the fact that Ismat was inseparable from her milieu and thoroughly steeped in her culture and its particular linguistic expressions. And thank God for that! How else could we have had stories like "Caut^h kī Jōṛī," "Badan kī Kufṭū" and "Dō Hāṭ^h" (to name just a few), and longer works like *Zidd*, *Dil kī Duryā*, and *Tarā Lahr*!

Ismat Chughtai was born on August 15, 1915 into a middle-class family in Badayun (India). She was ninth of ten children (six brothers, four sisters), and since her older sisters got married while Ismat was very young, the better part of her childhood was spent in the company of her brothers, a factor which she admits contributed greatly to the frankness in her nature and writing.

Her brother, Mirza Azim Beg Chughtai, already an established writer when Ismat was still in her teens, was her first teacher and mentor. She read Thomas Hardy and then the romantic works of Hijab Imtiaz Ali, Majnun Gorakhpuri, and Niaz Fatehpuri. Before long she was writing melodramatic stories in secret, for she was afraid they would be considered unseemly and, if discovered, even bring her reprimand. The works of Dostoyevsky and Somerset Maugham had a great impact on her, and she also developed a special fondness for Chekhov. From O'Henry, as she said in an interview, she learned the conventions of storytelling. Among Urdu writers, Munshi Premchand was her favorite, and understandably so; having been influenced by Dickens, Tolstoy and, later, Gandhi, Premchand was the first Indian writer to pay special attention to the technical aspects of the short story and novel as developed in the West.

In college, beginning with Greek drama, continuing with Shakespeare, and down to Ibsen and Bernard Shaw, she read voraciously. Finally, at twenty-three, Ismat decided that she was ready for some serious writing of her own. Her first short story "Fazāḍī" (The Troublemaker) was published in *Sāḡī*, a prestigious literary magazine. Its readers were perplexed; they wondered why Azim Beg Chughtai (Ismat's writer-brother) had "changed" his name!

In 1936, still working on her bachelor's degree, she attended the first meeting of the Progressive Writers' Association in Lucknow. Here she met Rashid Jahan for the first time. A doctor by profession and a writer, "a woman of a particularly strong-willed, liberated sort," Rashid Jahan was the only woman to leave a lasting impression on Ismat, who would later recall: "She spoilt me a lot because she was very bold and never shied away from speaking her mind, and I just wanted to copy her."

After her B.A. Ismat worked for a B.T. (a bachelor's in Education), thus becoming the first Indian Muslim woman to have earned both degrees. Subsequently, she was appointed principal of a girls' college and, later, in Bombay, Inspectress of schools. She also worked in Aligarh for a time. Here she met Shahid Latif, who was at the time working on his master's degree. The two developed a close friendship. They were married in 1942.

Two months before her marriage, Ismat wrote the short story "Liḥāf," which created quite a stir then and continues to be considered one of the most controversial works ever produced by a woman writer in the Subcontinent. A frustrated housewife, whose *navāb* (lord) husband has no time for her, finds sexual gratification and emotional solace in the companionship of a female servant. Ismat cleverly tells the story from the viewpoint of a nine-year-old girl who can relate everything she sees without being burdened with the caution or restraint an adult female narrator might experience in recounting such a tale.

When "Liḥāf" was published, a storm of controversy broke out. Readers and critics alike condemned the author and her story. She was charged with obscenity and, subsequently, was dragged to the court. The trial, which took place in Lahore, lasted two years, at the end of which the court dismissed the case as it couldn't find any "four-letter words" in the offending work.

Kalyān (Buds) and *Āpāt* (Wounds/Injuries), Ismat Chughtai's first two collections of short stories, were published in Azim Beg Chughtai's lifetime. Other collections came later, among them: *Ēk Bar* (A Word), *Ġa'ī-mā'ī* (The Sensitive One), *Dhātī Bāḳḳī* (Green Bracelets), *DāḤāḥ* (Two Hands), *Karīd Lā* (Buy!), *Ēk Qatra-e Xān* (A Drop of Blood), and *Tharī n Pagal* (Just a Little Crazy). She also wrote novels *Tarīkī Lakḥr* (The Crooked Line) and *Sandā'ī* (The Mad Man) and novellas *Ziddī* (The Stubborn One), *Dil kī Duniya* (Realm of the Heart), and *Mā'yūma* (The Innocent). Her other books include *Ham Lāg* (We People), a collection of short stories and essays; *Yahān se Vahān tak* (From Here to There), a collection of essays; *Śaīḡān* (The Devil), a collection of plays; and *Afān*

Dramat (Stories and Plays). Additionally, in collaboration with her husband, Ismat wrote twelve film scripts. She also made five films independently. Some years ago she played a small but important role in Shashi Kapoor's film *Junān* (Madness/Craze).

Ismat had two daughters by Shahid Latif. After his death she continued living in Bombay, a city she loved dearly. Once she was asked if she had any unfulfilled desires and she replied that she wished "to be reborn in India." Sadly, she was never awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, one of the most prestigious given to Indian literati. However, rather belatedly, she did receive the Samman Award for Urdu literature in 1990, the year she turned seventy-five. Ismat Chughtai died on October 24, 1991.

Ismat Chughtai began writing at a time when South Asian women were still sequestered and their voice suppressed. Tradition and ethical mores held a tight grip on society and any attempt on the part of women to write poetry or fiction was viewed with profound skepticism. However, despite the taboo, certain women (notably Nazar Sajjad Hyder and Hijab Imtiaz Ali) did manage to make themselves heard. Ismat herself was affected initially by Hijab Imtiaz Ali's overly-romanticized themes and flamboyant, over-stated characters. But, although quite popular, the work of these early women writers and others like them was largely romantic or instructional and reformist in nature, with character development and subject matter remaining stilted and quite flawed. Soon, however, Ismat broke free from this influence, as is evident already in her first story "Pasidi" and later in "Liḥāf."

Like her male contemporaries such as Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Krishan Chander, Ismat was influenced a great deal by Western fiction writers of the late nineteenth century. This influence was most noticeable in her conscious selection of social and sexual themes. She treated these themes with frankness and sensitivity, without being judgmental. The subject matter was delivered in a style which was bold, innovative, rebellious, and unabashedly realistic in both its portrayal of character and its analysis of the human condition.

It was out of this tradition that "Liḥāf" came. It set the tone of Ismat's later work and also confirmed her place among the foremost writers of her time, such as Manto and Bedi. Although "Liḥāf" became the focal point of recognition for Ismat's work, her creative world was neither confined to nor exhausted by the theme of lesbianism. She had

much, much more to offer.

Some critics have found Ismat rather limited in her choice of subject matter. Perhaps that is true. She was indeed at her best when she wrote about the world she was most familiar with, a world crowded with mothers-in-law, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmothers, servants and a whole network of neighbors. She knew these characters well and she portrayed them in their milieu with vivid and masterful realism.

On the other hand, there are stories such as "Muqaddas Farg" (Sacred Duty), "Kuhviri" (The Virgin), "Sotry Mummy," "Kaddh Dhag" (Breakable Threads), and "Lady Killer" which provide instances of Ismat's writing at its worst. When she delved into the high society and film studios of metropolitan Bombay, with the intent to expose their sham and hypocrisy, her pen faltered. She tended to editorialize and pontificate, thus considerably weakening the power of her narrative.

This inability to be thoroughly at home in both worlds, inasmuch as she chose to write about both, can be viewed as Ismat Chughtai's one great flaw. But perhaps we judge her too harshly. It is the perfection we observe within the limits of her world that we should be concerned with.

Ismat was at her best when she wrote about ordinary people, especially women. The better part of her writing shows a deep and abiding preoccupation with women's issues, particularly their cultural status and their myriad roles in Indian society. By underscoring women's struggles against the oppressive institutions of her time, she brings to her fiction an understanding of the female psyche that is unique; no other Urdu fiction writer has approached women's issues with the same degree of sensitivity and concern.

Theme and plot, however, are nothing without language. It is Ismat's diction, her unique and rich idiom that thrills any reader who views Urdu not only as a language but also as a veritable institution. Her diction is closely related to the social and cultural aspects of life in middle-class Muslim families of Uttar Pradesh. And along with the linguistic patterns characteristic of this group, there is also the colorful, robust, and completely unrestrained vernacular employed by the servant class and women who made their living at menial jobs and were not "begams." Dialects come alive and idioms explode on every page of her work, so that each paragraph becomes more than just a collection of sentences conveying an idea; it represents a way of life, traditions, a whole philosophy. Class consciousness, clothing styles, cooking habits, foods, elements of social exchange, customs regarding such important events as birth, marriage and death are presented for our scrutiny. For example, we

can see the practice of matchmaking at work in the story "Bicchū Phuph" (Aunt Scorpion). It would be incorrect to assume that the tradition of matchmaking has died out; in India and Pakistan there are still households where the practice follows a somewhat similar, if not identical, route. One may also learn in the same story how a Muslim shroud is prepared, how the cloth is squared and measured and ripped by hand, without the use of scissors. And in the story "Ghūngḥar" (The Veil) we meet a woman whose loyalty to the institution of marriage has tragically consumed her whole life, a phenomenon deeply ingrained in the very fiber of South Asian culture.

Even though Ismat didn't do much writing after the sixties, her life and presence in the years that followed became emblematic of an era, a special gilded age of Urdu fiction. In her final years, she was not so much a person as a legend, not so much a woman as a myth. Sometimes I think of Ismat Chughtai as an icon, as a powerful idea with a gentle face. When in the course of translating one of her works, I came across that all-too-familiar line drawing of her, that oval face surrounded by short curly hair, those smiling eyes behind small, round, wire-rimmed spectacles and that mouth which is just barely engaged in a shy smile, I told myself that it is the face of a woman who had nurtured and lived, every minute of her life, an unflinchingly passionate and courageous commitment to truth. But there is something else: it is also the face of a woman who never forgot who she was, who was glad to be a woman, who, if offered the choice, would be a woman again and again.

Aunty Scorpion

WHEN I SAW HER for the first time she was seated in the ground-floor window of Rahman Bhai's house cursing and swearing. This window, which looked into our courtyard, was kept closed as a matter of principle since there was always the possibility of coming face to face with women who observed purdah. Rahman Bhai was in the employ of nautch girls. No matter what the function at his house—a circumcision ceremony, *birnillah*, or wedding—Rahman Bhai always succeeded in getting one of these women to dance at the celebration; Waheeda Jan, Mushrari Bai and Anwari were able to grace a poor man's house at least once with their presence.

But he treated the young girls and women in his neighborhood with the utmost respect. His younger brothers, Bundu and Genda, on the other hand, were always getting into trouble because of their philandering ways. Still, his neighbors did not view him favorably. He had established illicit relations with his sister-in-law while his wife lived. This orphaned girl, who had no one in the world to call her own except her sister, had been forced to live in her sister's house. She took care of her sister's children and with the exclusion of nursing them herself, she did everything for them, including cleaning their soiled clothes and washing their filth. And then one day a woman from the neighborhood saw her nursing the baby. The secret was out. People realized that half the children in that household resembled their aunt. Rahman's wife may have castigated her sister in private, but in public she never admitted to any wrongdoing on her part. She always said, "Whoever accuses a virgin of such things will be punished by fate." However, she was on a constant lookout for a groom for her sister. But who would want to have anything

"Bilal^h P^hup^h," from her collection *De Har^h* (Lahore: Sāi Mahal Kūtib Ghār, 1966), pp. 179–194.

to do with the worm-eaten kabob? In one eye she had a white spot the size of a penny, and because one foot was smaller than the other, she walked with a limp.

A strange kind of boycott had come into effect in the neighborhood. If someone needed Rahman Bhai's services he was simply given an order along with, "Haven't we given you permission to continue living here?" And Rahman Bhai quietly submitted because he considered this to be an honor.

That is why she sat in Rahman Bhai's window and delivered lengthy invectives. The others were afraid of Abba; who wanted to tangle with a magistrate?

On that day I discovered that Badshahi Khanum, whom we called Bichu Phupi, was my only real aunt, my father's real sister, and this long-drawn tongue-lashing was aimed at members of our family.

Amma's face was ashen. Cowering, she fearfully sat in her room as if waiting for Bichu Phupi's voice to strike her like a bolt of lightning. Every six months or so Bichu Phupi stationed herself in Rahman Bhai's window and bellowed at us. Reclining in a chair slightly out of her view, Abba would appear totally immersed in the newspaper in his lap during all of this. Occasionally he sent up one of the boys with a message for her, repudiating something she had said. A new burst of temper followed as a result. All of us would abandon our play and congregate in the veranda to hear our dear Bichu Phupi swear and curse. The window at which she sat was filled with the weight and expanse of her body and she resembled Abba so much it seemed it was he up there without his moustache, a *dupatta* covering his head. Unruffled by the force of her diatribe, we calmly continued to stand around and gaze at her. Five feet six inches in height, thick wrists with joints like a lion's, hair white as a heron, large teeth, a voluminous chin, and her voice—God be praised! It was only one note lower than Abba's.

Bichu Phupi always wore white. The day her husband, Masud Phupa, made a play for the cleaning girl, Phupi smashed all her bangles with a stone weight and removed the colored *dupatta* from her head. From that day on she referred to her husband as "late" or "dead." She refused to allow hands and feet that had known the touch of a cleaning woman's body to come into contact with hers.

This unhappy event took place when she was quite young, and she had been suffering "widowhood" since then. Masud Phupa was also my mother's uncle. There was something strange in all this. Before they were married, my father was my mother's distant uncle. In those days my

mother was petrified by my father. When she found out she was about to become engaged to him she sneaked some opium from her grandmother's purse and swallowed it. Since the amount she ingested was very small she recovered after a few days of discomfort. Abba was in college in Aligarh at the time. He was in the middle of exams when he heard what had happened, and dropping everything he dashed to my grandmother's house. My grandfather, who was also Abba's first cousin and good friend, pacified him with great difficulty and tried to convince him to return to college. Hungry and nervous, Abba paced up and down not far from my mother's bed. Through the bed curtains, her eyes half-closed, my mother saw the shadow of his broad, overbeating shoulders shaking with anxiety.

"Umrao Bhai, if something happens to her . . .," the giant's voice broke.

Grandfather laughed loudly. "No, no, dear brother, don't worry, she will be all right."

At that moment my little, innocent mother became a woman; fear of this giantlike man vanished from her heart. For this reason Bichu Phupi used to say, "The woman is a magician, she had relations with my brother, she was pregnant before she was married."

When my mother heard these imprecations being uttered in the presence of her grown children, her face twinkled up and she started crying. At that time we forgot all her harsh treatment of us and felt a gentle fondness for her. But as for Abba, these foul remarks caused little fairies to dance in his eyes. He would send up Nannhe Bhai with an affectionate message for Bichu Phupi:

"Well, Phupi, what did you eat today?"

"Your mother's liver!" she exclaimed, burnt to a cinder with his response.

Abba would send her another message: "Why, Phupi, that's why you have hemorrhoids in your mouth. Take some laxative, I say, some laxative."

She would then begin cursing my older brother with the malediction that his virile body be picked by crows and vultures; she pronounced the curse of widowhood upon his bride-to-be who sat in some room, God knows where, dreaming about her bridegroom-to-be. And through all of this, her fingers stuffed in her ears, my mother would chant the incantation, "You are Might, You are Mighty, rid us of this calamity."

After a short while Abba would give Bichu Phupi another push and Nannhe Bhai would ask, "Badshahi Phupi, is Sweetpeas Phupi well?"

And we would wonder fearfully if Phupi might jump at us from the window now.

"Go, you son of a snake! Don't quibble with me or else I'll crush your face with my shoe! This old man hiding inside, why is he sending out the boys? If he is a true Mughal I challenge him to come out and face me himself."

"Rahman Bhai, O Rahman Bhai, why don't you give this wrinkled old hag some poison?" Scared out of his wits, Nannhe Bhai said what Abba had instructed him to. But he had no reason to be afraid because although he was the speaker, everyone knew the words came from Abba. For this reason the pain of sin would not be Nannhe Bhai's. Nevertheless, addressing such rude remarks to an aunt who resembled Abba so closely made him break out in a cold sweat.

What a difference there was between my father's family and my mother's. My mother's family lived in Hakimon Gali, while my father's family held residence in Banon Kathre. My mother's forefathers traced their roots to Salim Chishti. By awarding him the title of *mawlid*, the Mughal emperor had found the way to salvation. They had lived in Hindustan for hundreds of years; their complexions had become darker, their features had lost their sharpness, and their temperaments had mellowed.

My father's ancestors had arrived with the last of the troops. Mentally they were still riding in battle. There was a fire in their blood, their features bore the sharpness of a sword's edge, their complexions were fair like those of the British invaders, their statures reminded one of gorillas, their voices thundered like a lion's roar, and their hands and feet were like boards.

And my mother's kinsmen—they were of delicate build, of poetic temperament, and soft spoken. By profession they were usually *bakhsh* or *mandat*, which is why their street had come to be known as Hakimon Gali. Some of them had begun to take an interest in business and had turned to professions like gold-lace weaving and perfumery. Because most of my father's relatives held posts in the army, they considered these jobs to be low-class jobs and unsuitable for men. It is true that my mother's people had not developed an interest in any competitive sports—wrestling, swimming, arm-wrestling, fencing, for example. And Parchosi, a favorite in my mother's family, was viewed by my father's side of the family as a game fit only for eunuchs.

It is said that when a volcano erupts the lava flows into the valley. Perhaps that is why my mother's family was inevitably drawn to my

father's family. Answers to how and when this connection began can be found in the family records, but I don't really remember much. I know that my paternal grandfather was not born in Hindustan and my grandmothers were both from the same family. But there was one younger sister who was wed into the family of Sheikhs. Maybe my mother's people had cast a spell on my father's family, which is why they gave their daughter to "low class commoners," as Bichu Phupi liked to call them. While she swore at her "late" husband, she also heaped curses on her dead father who had ground the Chughtai name into the mud.

My aunt had three brothers. Two of them were older than her, one younger. Since she was the only sister, she became willful and headstrong, always getting her way, always forcing her three brothers to do her bidding. She was raised like a boy, rode horses, could use the bow and arrow, and was quite adept at fencing. Although her body had expanded to look like a mound, she still stuck out her chest proudly like a wrestler. Of course her chest was the size of four female chests.

Abba used to tease Amma: "Dear, would you like to wrestle with Badshahi?"

"May I be saved from punishment!" Amma would lift her hands to touch her ears, and mutter. But Abba immediately sent off Nanne Bhai with the challenge.

"Phupi, will you wrestle with my mother?"

"Yes, yes, why not? Go tell you mother to come here, tell her to prepare herself and come right away. If I don't make her look like a fool, don't call me Mirta Karim Beg's daughter! If you are your father's son, bring her to me, bring that daughter of a *maulvi* to me . . ."

Clutching the folds of her wide-legged *salwar* in one hand, Amma would hastily retreat into a corner.

"Aunt Badshahi, Grandfather was illiterate, wasn't he?"

Perhaps a long time ago Amma's great-grandfather had given Abba's father a few lessons. Abba distorted the facts to provoke Bichu Phupi.

"That man? What could that butt-wiper teach my father? That caretaker who was raised on our crumbs?" This was a reference to the relationship between Salim Chishti and Emperor Akbar. The Chughtais traced their lineage to the family of Emperor Akbar who had endowed Salim Chishti, my mother's ancestor, with the title of spiritual leader. But Phupi said, "Nonsense, utter nonsense! Spiritual leader indeed! He was just a caretaker at the shrine, just a caretaker."

She had three brothers, but she had quarreled with all of them.

When she battled with one, she reviled them all. The oldest was a devoutly religious man; she referred to him as a beggar and a vagrant. My father was a government official, so she called him a traitor and a slave of the British (because the British had put an end to Mughal rule). But for that she would have been in Lal Qila now, drenched in rose perfume, a queen, instead of ending up with her "late" husband whom she accused of belonging to that class of weavers who had a penchant for soupy *dal*. Her third brother, my youngest uncle, was a scoundrel and a villain. The policeman used to appear at our door nervously to check on his whereabouts because he had committed innumerable thefts and murders and was a drunk and a debauchee. Bichu Phupi referred to him as a dacoit, a title that was rather insipid when viewed against the colorful background of his career.

When she squabbled with her husband, however, she would say, "May your face burn! I'm not helpless and alone, I'm the only sister of three brothers. If they hear of this you will not be able to show your face to the world. As a matter of fact, if my youngest brother finds out he will take out your intestines and slap them into your hands, he's a dacoit, a dacoit! And should you escape his wrath, my magistrate brother will make you rot in jail, he'll force you to grind grain for the rest of your life. And if by some chance you slip from his hands, the oldest, who is so pious, will put a curse on your afterlife. Look here, I'm a Mughal woman, not some Sheikhani or a common worker's daughter like your mother." But Uncle Masud knew that he had the sympathy of the three brothers, so he listened to the stream of abuse with a smile. It was this very smile that my mother's relatives had used to torment my father's family for years.

On every Eid feast day my father went directly from the mosque to Bichu Phupi's house with his sons to hear her curse and swear. On their arrival she hastily withdrew into the inner room and from there issued insults about my sorceress mother and her villainous brother. She sent out her servant with sweet vermicelli, but with the message, "This is from a neighbor."

"There is no poison in this, is there?" Abba would tease. And right away my mother and her family would be shredded to pieces. After partaking of the *resaiyan* Abba gave her *ḥalī* which she would immediately throw on the floor, saying, "Give this money to your wife's brothers who have lived on your scraps." Abba would leave quietly. He knew that as soon as his back was turned she would pick up the money, press it to her eyes, and weep for hours. She sent for her nephews and secretly gave them *ḥalī*.

"Bastards, if you breathe a word of this to your father or mother I'll cut you up into little pieces and feed you to the dogs." But Abba knew how much she had given the boys. If for some reason Abba was not able to make it to her house on Eid, one message followed after another. "Nusrat Khanum (my mother) is widowed at last . . . good, I'm glad, I'm so relieved." Insulting messages continued to pour in all day; then in the evening she would make an appearance at Rahman Bhai's window and start swearing at us from there.

One day while eating *arwayat* Abba became nauseated and threw up, probably due to the heat.

"Badshahi Begum, please forgive and forget—my time has come it seems," he groaned. Without wasting a second, her veil thrown carelessly over her face, beating her chest with her hands, Bichu Phupi was at our door in oo time. But when she saw Abba laughing mischievously she turned around and left, leaving behind a trail of insults in her wake as she stormed out of the house.

"Because you are here Badshahi, the angel of death has taken off in fear," Abba said. "I would certainly have died today if you had not come."

I cannot tell you what kind of maledictions fell from Bichu Phupi's lips. As soon as she saw he was out of danger she said, "God willing you will be struck by a bolt of lightning, you'll take your last breath in the gutter, there won't be anyone around to carry you to the grave."

Abba gave her two rupees and teased, "We must pay our family entertainers for their spoofery."

Momentarily befuddled, Phupi blurted out, "Give the money to your mother and sister!" And immediately thereafter she slapped her face and said, "*Al* Badshahi, may your face be blackened—you're digging your own grave?"

Actually Bichu Phupi was at daggers drawn only with Abba. If she met Amma by herself somewhere she would draw her close and hug her and lovingly call her "Nachu, Nachu," and ask, "are the children well?" She completely forgot that the children she was inquiring about were the offspring of that unfortunate brother whom she had cursed all her life. Amma was also her niece. What a rigmarole it was! By some odd coincidence I was my mother's distant cousin as well, and by that token my father was also my brother-in-law. There's no doubt that my mother's family caused Bichu Phupi's family much grief, but it was really disastrous when Bichu Phupi's daughter, Musarrat Khanum, fell in love with my mother's brother.

This is what happened. My mother's grandmother, who was also

my father's aunt, fell sick and when she was about to die, members of both families arrived to tend to her. Uncle Muzaffar, my mother's brother, came to nurse his grandmother, and Musarrat Khanum arrived with her mother who was there to minister to her aunt.

Bichu Phupi had no fear in her heart. She knew that she had trained her children to hate and despise her side of the family, and Musarrat Khanum was too young anyway; only fifteen, she still slept with her mother and as far as Bichu Phupi was concerned she was still a baby.

But when Uncle Muzaffar lifted his brown, liquid eyes and saw Musarrat Khanum's delicate form, he could not tear his gaze away from her.

During the day, when the elders, tired from a full night of waiting hand and foot on my mother's grandmother, slept, the faithful young sat at the sick woman's bedside, keeping less of an eye on her and more on each other. When Musarrat Khanum extended her hand to remove the cold compress from the old lady's forehead, Uncle Muzaffar's hand was already there.

The next day the old woman suddenly opened her eyes. Shaky, using the pillows to lift herself, she slowly sat up and immediately summoned the whole family. "Call a *manlat*," she ordered.

Everyone was perplexed. No one could understand why she wanted the *manlat* at this time. Did she want to get married on her deathbed? But not a single person had the courage to question her command.

"Marry these two right away." People were dumbfounded. Who were "these two?" Just then Musarrat Khanum fainted and fell to the floor. Alarmed, Uncle Muzaffar quickly ran out of the room. The thieves were caught. The ceremony took place. Bichu Phupi was stunned.

Although nothing untoward had happened—they had simply held hands briefly—the old woman thought they had exceeded the limits.

And now Bichu Phupi exploded. She attacked without the aid of horse and sword and laid waste to the path before her. Her son-in-law and daughter were banished from the house that very moment. Since they had nowhere to go, Abba brought them to our house. Amma was beside herself with joy to be in the company of such a beautiful sister-in-law, and *salima* celebrations were held with great pomp.

Bichu Phupi didn't see her daughter's face again and announced she would henceforth hide her face from her brother. She was already estranged from her husband and now she turned away from the rest of the world. What was it but a poison that invaded her heart and head; her life threatened her like a viper.

"The old hag played this little game so she could ensnare my daughter for her grandson," she kept saying, and she might have been right because the old lady lived for another twenty years after that.

Brother and sister never reconciled. When paralysis struck Abba for the fourth time and the end seemed near, he sent for Bichu Phupi.

"Badshahi, I'm taking my last breath, come now if you want to fulfill your heart's desire."

Who knows what arrows were concealed in this message. The brother sent them and they pierced the sister's heart. Trembling, bearing her chest with her hands, Bichu Phupi appeared at the door she had abandoned for a lifetime and thundered into the house like a white volcano.

"Badshahi, your prayers are being answered." Abba was smiling despite his pain. His eyes still had a youthful look in them.

Although her hair was all white, Bichu Phupi suddenly looked like the little Bichu who used to throw a tantrum and force her brothers to give in to her every request. In her eyes, which were usually vicious like a lion's, was a fearful, cowering expression: large tears rolled down her marble cheeks.

"Bichu, my dear, scold me," Abba said lovingly. Between sobs my mother begged Bichu Phupi for curses.

"O God, O God," she tried to roar, but her voice quivered and broke instead. "O God, bless my brother with my life . . . dear God, in the name of your beloved prophet . . ." She began weeping like a child who is frustrated because she cannot remember a lesson correctly.

Everyone became pale. The earth seemed to slip from under Amma's feet. O God! Not a single curse fell from Bichu Phupi's lips that day!

Abba was the only one who was smiling, smiling the way he used to when he heard her swear.

It is true that a sister's curses cannot harm her brother. They are dipped in mother's milk.

—Translated by Tahira Naqvi



A Selection from
The Realm of the Heart

WHAT A STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS TIME it is when you suddenly open your eyes and can't tell whether the sun is setting or just rising, which way your feet are going or where your head is, and you don't know where you slept and what this place is where you've awakened! It becomes urgent at that moment to locate your head and feet; you have this feeling that if you don't find out immediately you'll be lost forever.

When we were children our first reaction was tears, but then a wallop came down from somewhere and right away we were able to place ourselves, to determine where everything was. All at once fountains of mirth burst forth and to provide further proof of our presence we ran after the hens or began scrapping with one another like dogs. At that point Amma ordered us to make ourselves scarce, and this we happily did. Fleeing to the garden we proceeded to pluck off half-opened buds from the bushes and filled our laps with them.

Thus we occupied ourselves until it got dark. Then Ali Bakhsh would bring in a bunch of lanterns from behind the curtain hanging in the front doorway. The wicks were raised and lighted and the lanterns were dispatched to every corner of the house so that the walls and doors which had been engulfed in darkness were visible again.

The watchman climbed a ladder and lighted the boxed lamp at the front door. Frightened, the bushes hastily retreated into the darkness and the buds we had collected in our laps began to flower. At that time, and for no apparent reason, we were assailed by feelings of dread. A stealthy chameleon, its cheeks ballooning as it manufactured poison in its mouth, turned red like an ember and then scampered up the tamarind tree. And

we felt as if our feet were melting like wax.

This was when that mysterious voice floated and vibrated as it travelled across the water:

*Kanhaiya, your flute has become my
enemy . . .*

We ran without a moment wasted, dashed through the curtain at the front door, threw down the flowers on our grandmother's prayer mat and took refuge under her *dupattā*.

"Dadi Amma! Please! Quick! Read *ayat-ul-kurti*! Blow on us!"

Only when we felt Dadi Amma's "Ahmed Husain, Dildar Husain" soaked in tobacco and betel juice blow on our faces did we breathe sighs of relief.

Kanhaiya . . . jo . . . u . . . r . . . flunute . . . has . . . become my . . . enemy . . . The sound weakened and then disappeared altogether, leaving behind only the whispering of the wind.

Our father had been transferred recently to Behrath. Situated across from our spacious, two-story bungalow was the shrine of Saiyad Salar Masud Ghazi. Adjacent to the house was a garden where we spent the major part of our waking lives. At the end of a long line of modest sized quarters was a large well, and in back of the quarters were fields of corn. On the other side stood a white mosque with rows of *har-shag*¹⁴ trees and bushes of *bela*, *zambeli*, and *mogra* extending as far as the eye could see. Not too far from the mosque was a Muslim cemetery and on the banks of the river, some distance away from the mosque, beyond the melon plantation, were the Hindu cremation grounds. The cemetery and the cremation grounds—we dreaded these two spots the most. The mysterious voice appeared to come from this direction and anything coming from over there struck fear into our hearts.

Whenever we were out of line, or if we squabbled, we were scared into obedience by references to that voice.

"She's a demon, she'll eat you up alive. She's a ghou! If she lays hands on you she'll cast a spell on you. Don't you know what they say? A wedding party once drowned in the Ghagra stream but the bride survived. She turned into a demon and floats about in the stream to this day."

There was something else associated with this voice. No sooner was it heard than Aunt Qudsia suffered a paroxysm; her jaw locked, she'd begin to foam at the mouth and the house turned into an abode of anguish.

"O Mighty Qadir, bring us Qudsia's husband," Nani Bivi (our maternal grandmother) chanted, swaying. But Mighty Qadir seemed to have stopped up his ears because he didn't seem to pay any heed to her pleas; perhaps he was too busy ruminating on the matter of bringing Aunt Qudsia's husband back to her.

She had been married for nearly ten years. Her father packed off her husband to England soon after the wedding; that was one of the conditions of the marriage. In keeping with custom, he returned with an English wife, a *mum*. Now he had a clinic in Menpuri. This is why Aunt Qudsia endlessly chanted verses from the Qur'an, spent long hours in worship and prayer, and when all of this proved fruitless, suffered from attacks in which her jaw locked and her mouth foamed. Unfortunate woman, what else could she do? She penned several letters beginning with "My master, may you live long." She wrote: "Give me a spot in a corner of your house as a maid of the *memsahib*, I'll serve you both, I'll eat your leftovers, wear you castoffs, and if I utter one word of dissatisfaction, you may punish me as one punishes a thief. You are the master, I your slave, what better fate can I ask for than dying at your feet?" etc., etc. But the master apparently deemed it foolish to bother with a reply.

Usually Aunt Qudsia was introduced to people like this: "This is Qudsia, her husband has taken in a white woman." People were quite impressed. At that moment Aunt Qudsia too forgot her own misfortune and experienced a certain degree of pride. Her rival was the daughter of the rulers; who knows, maybe she was distantly related to the king. Not everyone can take in a *mum*. In a way her husband had honored her by bringing a white woman to be her rival; he could have taken in a washerwoman or a sweepst.

Aunt Qudsia was married at the age of fifteen. Six months after the wedding her husband left for England. For two years a fervid romance flourished. Her head lowered, she was seen either writing to her husband or reading one of his letters. Gradually the letters cooled off. She continued her frenzied letter writing, but received no replies. Then all kinds of bad news started trickling in. After the First World War white women diminished in value, and whoever went abroad returned with one almost as a matter of routine. But Aunt Qudsia's husband turned out to be rather strange. There were other men as well who were bringing home white women, but once every six or seven months they also showed their faces to their Hindustani wives. Her husband, on the other hand, maintained absolute silence and made no effort to find out how she was doing.

And that's why Aunt Qudsia became hysterical during 'Urs (the celebrations at the shrine), that's why whenever there was a wedding in the neighborhood her jaw locked, or when, in the darkness of night someone sang a song of separation, she frothed at the mouth. But this mysterious voice affected her the most, so much so that she paced restlessly, cracked her knuckles, nervously twisted the corners of her *dupatta*, and suffered an attack of hysterics.

We were picking buds off the bushes. Our laps were overflowing, but we lingered to see the lighting of the boxed lamp at the front door. Suddenly the voice floated right behind us. Our hair stood on end. We turned in surprise. She was perched on the trunk of a fallen fig tree that had come down during a storm and now sat among crumbling gravestones in the cemetery behind the mosque. Her face wore a sad look. She paused in her singing. Our feet weighed heavily, like sacks stuffed with straw.

"Let go of my *dupatta*," she murmured petulantly, as if addressing someone behind her.

Terrified, we ran away wildly. No one was holding her *dupatta*. There was no one there.

She stood up hastily, and tugging at a corner of her *dupatta* darted away laughing as though she were being playfully pursued. Soon she had disappeared into the trees.

Fear gripped us, our feet seemed to pull us down.

"We'll meet in Meerut!" In the distance her voice echoed and we ducked around the curtain on the front door and into the house.

*You, beloved, so dark, and I so fair,
We shall gaze at each other in the mirror.*

Her voice tottered again like a top and we felt as if there were needles running down our backs.

*You, beloved, so stout, and I so thin,
On scales we shall both be weighed.*

What a coincidence! Aunt Qudsia's husband was both stout and dark, but there were no signs of meeting him in Meerut. What could she do except have an attack of hysteria?

Nani Bivi was busy with something else. Dadi Amma, who was still

murmuring over the prayer beads, blew on us, but our fear was not abated. Uff! How many grandmothers there were, and aunts, both maternal and paternal, but what good were they? There was no vigor in their blowings.

"Stay away from her, child," the attendant at the shrine said one Thursday when we arrived there with our usual offering of flowers. "She's very dangerous."

"Why?"

"She brings bad luck, she ate her parents and her husband."

"She ate them?" We thought she sprinkled salt and pepper on them and really ate them.

"If she catches you alone she'll pull out your heart and eat it," he frightened us further.

"Is she a demon?"

"Of course."

"May God help us!" Uncle Machu, who had come with us, interjected. "What nonsense is this. No, dear child, she's insane." He glared threateningly at the attendant.

"Insane?" We didn't like Uncle Machu's explanation. All the romance had melted away. She's just insane? And not insane in an amusing way either; she doesn't smell, or rip her clothes, nor does she throw stones at anyone. Instead, whenever you chance to run into her, you find her singing.

*Beloved, I'll be a flower in your lap,
A flower in your lap, beloved.*

What a melodious voice. That's why Aunt Qudsia became so agitated when she heard her sing.

"Anma dear, please send for her, we'll hear her sing."

"No, child, I'm not going to send for that mad wretch. She's from a good family and look how she wanders all over the place without restraint, her purdah forgotten. She's possessed, you know; all the others drowned in the Ghagra stream, but she remained afloat for three days as if there were something holding her up."

"But the unhappy creature sings well." Aunt Qudsia nursed an obsession for songs. When Uncle Shabbir sang devotional songs, streams and rivulets flowed from her eyes.

"O Rasool-e Arabi, To you I offer my life," he sang and Aunt Qudsia, her *dupatta* held to her nose, sobbed as she swayed to the rhythm

of his song. Everyone sat at attention, waiting for the paroxysm that invariably overtook Aunt Qudsia when Uncle Shabbir came and sang. Her hands would rotate, her eyes rolled up in their sockets, and foam bubbled at her mouth. Nani Bivi and Dadi Amma would run toward her to blow holy incantations on her while Uncle Shabbir, seated on the wooden divan, tried to conceal the shaking of his hands. Until Aunt Qudsia calmed down, he paced up and down outside the front door.

Uncle Shabbir was related to Aunt Qudsia by marriage; he was a brother-in-law. The only child of poor parents, he was a timid, uninteresting and ineffectual man and it was indeed lucky he was an only child; we might have had to contend with several uninteresting and ineffectual uncles instead of one. He was very thin, and nearly three feet taller than Aunt Qudsia. Humped over like a camel, he was in the habit of taking long strides when he walked.

"Shabbir Bhai, please sing something," Aunt Qudsia would entreat in a melancholy voice. "Please, it will calm my nerves."

"What can I sing, I have a scratchy throat today." He always presented the same excuse. Then he cleared his throat, blinked his eyes a few times, flared his nostrils, placed both hands together between his knees, and:

*O east wind, if you travel to Taysabba,
Promise that you will embrace the
curtains of the sanctuary.*

He sang in a clear, unsullied voice. You felt sorry for him. The east wind had also plugged its ears, it seemed; it didn't hear him nor did it travel to Taysabba at his behest.

It was common knowledge that Uncle Shabbir was in love with Aunt Qudsia. But what a sluggish, timid love it was. Other young men and women in the family also loved, and what a sprightly, energetic love that was! You saw them grappling on one pretext or another, grabbing hold of each other in corners, finding any opportunity to crush one another in an embrace, snatching, tussling during a game of Parcheesi, scrambling for the dice. Grandmothers, uncles, and various aunts scolded them endlessly and cursed, but no one paid any attention to their remonstrations and the laughter and giggling continued unchecked.

Uncle Shabbir, on the other hand, never even sat close to Aunt Qudsia, never allowed even his little finger to touch her; she was forbidden fruit which belonged to another, to a man who had put her

somewhere and forgotten about her. She had recently turned twenty-five and already there were silver strands gleaming in her hair. Everyone hoped she would age quickly so the matter could be put to rest once and for all.

"No, I'm not going near that mad wretch," the old smelly stone, Pathani Bua, retorted when Aunt Qudsia solicited her help. "That husband-eater threatens you with a stone every time you go near her."

"What's amazing is that the ruffians out there don't harass her. If it had been some other girl she'd be in shreds by now. The wretch, she roams around in the woods all night dressed up in her finery. Isn't she scared?" Chachi Bi asked.

"Why, what's she got to be scared of?" Pathani Bua said. "No one dares to look at her with a crooked eye."

"Why? Is she a lioness, will she tear you into pieces? She's always alone, isn't she?"

"No, she's not alone, her husband is with her."

"What husband?"

"Bale Mian . . ."

"What nonsense! Don't be a fool, woman."

"This isn't nonsense, I swear, she's the beloved of her husband, she's a true faithful of our Ghazi Mian."

Pathani Bua proceeded to explain in greater detail. Bua was Ghazi Mian's beloved and this despite the fact that Ghazi Mian was martyred four hundred years ago. Love is not fettered by the chains of time.

There was an *Urs* at Ghazi Mian's shrine every year. *Qawwali* singers and others came from far and wide. People of every religion and caste, old and young, children, women and men, all made the pilgrimage to the shrine, acknowledged vows, received answers to their prayers.

Every Thursday the singing girls from the town and its neighboring districts arrived with their offerings. They sang *ghazals*, *didrais*, and *qasab* in honor of Ghazi Mian. When a singing girl was ready to surrender her virginity she would first sing and dance at Mian's shrine. A fair was held during the flame-ridden heat of May and June and the faithful came months ahead of time and set up camps. Such enormous crowds gathered during the actual days of the fair that you couldn't find an empty spot anywhere. Stretched in front of the main entrance of the shrine was an over-sized marquee on which the arriving devotees threw garlands, sweetmeats and money.

Flags were transported here from neighboring towns and districts. There were sixty-foot tall bamboo poles with clusters of black or white hair attached to the top, while just below them hung streamers made

from rupee notes. Anyone who got his wish offered the standard at the shrine. Dancing and leaping to the beat of kettle drums, the men arrived at the entrance of the shrine and formed a circle; a muscular man built like a wrestler, balancing the standard, stationed himself in the middle of the circle; in order to keep the banner steady, to prevent it from tipping, four other men held on to ropes extending from the spire of the standard. Then, lifting up the standard, the man danced and executed tricks with it. Sometimes he'd place the base of the standard on his forehead and wriggle his body, other times he caught it between his teeth and swayed. Finally, when everyone began sweating, or maybe when the group ran out of time (there were other groups with standards waiting their turn), the weary flag was furled around the pole like a sail tied to its mast, hefted onto shoulders and carried into the shrine through the tall entranceway. And then another flag dance began. At the end of the fair days all the flags were auctioned off.

Our mother bought flags every year for use as floor cloths. These were the best examples of tambour-work. Embroidered on the rough cotton fabric were colorful designs in the shapes of elephants and horses. Here you could see whole armies on the march with their spears hoisted, there a caravan of camels; in another corner were flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cows, along with groups of men and women exchanging secrets. We would roll around on the divans all day long, observing the scenes below us, never tiring of what we saw.

Besides the flags, those whose prayers had been heard also offered, in accordance with what they had promised, gold and silver figurines, tables, chairs, beds, and pots and pans.

All this was followed by Ghazi Mian's wedding ceremonies. A kettle drum was placed at the entranceway. Early in the morning the drum-playing commenced in an irritating manner and continued late into the night. All day one group after another came and surrounded the drum players, and sometimes one or two men broke into sad songs about lost love. As soon as one group had exhausted itself, another took its place. Women possessed by evil spirits came to Mian's door to be rid of the evil spirits; they loosened their hair and rolled their heads rhythmically from side to side, and when the person chanting holy verses blew smoke over them, they screamed and fainted. But it wasn't long before they regained consciousness and started swaying again. If the spirit were a stubborn creature it would not budge for days; red and green clubs were used to punish it and only then, after a terrible struggle, did it depart. Happy and contented, the women who had been healed then made offerings at the

shrine and went their ways.

On the fifth of the moth came the ceremony of the fan, the sandalwood ceremony on the seventh, and on the ninth the henna ceremony was observed. At night on that day, Ghazi Mian's shirt—on which the Qur'an was inscribed in its entirety—was brought out for public viewing. Frenzied crowds engulfed it. On the eleventh the ceremony marking the readying of the marriage procession took place.

A long time ago, Radha Bai, alias Zuhra Bibi, a child widow from a family in Raduli, lost her heart to Mian. Ghazi Mian appeared to her in a dream and accepted her love. She made her home in his shrine. She was known to wash the tomb with her tears and sweep the floor of the shrine with her hair every day. Her father was an oil merchant. He forcibly dragged her away from Ghazi Mian, but Radha refused to give in. All girls with the name 'Radha' are stubborn; boldly and fearlessly they announce their love, suffer every dishonor and stigma happily, and put life and soul on the line. And the dice roll in their favor. Unfavorable winds are compelled to lower their heads when confronted with the ardor of their love, people begin to worship them, sing songs about them, and finally they are looked upon as goddesses.

Ghazi Mian's Radha also had to tread on coals. She too had to drag herself through thorns. Her mother beat her senseless, her father whipped her with moistened rope and tied her to a peg in the cow's shed. And the whole village spat at her. In the middle of the night, when poor Radha, starving and thirsty, weary from her wounds and splattered with cow dung, was taking her last breath, Ghazi Mian came to her. He washed her wounds with his tears, clasped her to his sacred chest, and dipping his forefinger into his heart's blood he filled the parting in her hair with bridal vermillion.

When the demented Mira fell in love with her Gindhar Gopal the world let vipers loose in her life and gave her a cup of poison to drink and then . . . Krishan Murari's flute came to life and . . . the viper . . . turned into a garland of flowers . . . the cup of poison brimmed over with the elixir of life.

The next morning the inhabitants of Raduli awoke to the sounds of temple bells and the *azan* echoing from the minaret of the mosque. Immersed in the fragrance of sandalwood, dressed in majestic clothes, Radha lay on a bed of flowers in everlasting sleep. There was not a single scratch on her, her body glowed like burnished gold, her hair shone with vermillion.

People in Raduli were thunderstruck. A meeting of the village

elders was called. It was decided that the girl now belonged in another's house, there was no reason for her to stay in her parents' home. So she was delivered to her groom's dwelling.

The Hindus called her Radha, the Muslims referred to her as Zuhra Bibi. Her plain, unpretentious grave sat at the foot of Mian's tomb. At one end of her grave grew a tamarind tree whose bark was known to exude the fragrance of sandalwood when burnt.

Since Radha's death the Raduliwallahs had been bringing an offering of Mian's wedding procession to the shrine every year. Children were put to bed early so they could be aroused around three o'clock in the morning to witness the arrival of the procession. As soon as the familiar sound of trumpets was heard everyone was awakened. Quickly slapping some water on our faces, we all ran up to the roof to see the procession enter the village.

It's been so many years, but to this day my eyes are blinded by the memory of that *barat*. A white steed in the front, heavily laden with silver and gold ornaments, covered with flowers, the silvery strands of the diadem kissing the hooves.

"Look, there's Bale Mian!" We thought we could really see him seated on the horse.

Behind the horse was a palanquin with fine red muslin curtains and inside the center of the palanquin was the Qur'an with a candle burning alongside it.

"The bride, the bride!" We were spellbound. The trembling flame of the candle behind the red muslin curtains appeared to take the form of a shy, reticent bride. Following the bride were the wedding guests carrying tiny umbrellas. These were decorated with small stars between embroidered bands, and beaded silver and gold tassels swung from their edges. Twirling these umbrellas like reels, swaying, dancing, the members of the wedding procession filled the streets. It was a dazzling sight. For days afterward little umbrellas continued to dance in my vision.

Sometimes when you see something very beautiful you feel a lump in your throat. Aunt Qudsia always had a lump in her throat and all she needed was an excuse to start weeping. Resting her head on the window sill, she shed voluminous tears; seeing a wedding procession always cut her to the very heart. But everyone was saddened by this *barat*. Was this a wedding procession or a funeral? Life's doots are shut on a young, frail girl, she wants to create a world of dreams and open a small window in it. But the stupid people around her don't allow it because she threatens their beliefs. And what happens? She shatters all their beliefs and turns

away from them.

But Uncle Shabbir was neither Krishan Murari nor Ghazi Mian. He was an incomplete, hollow man. He could not turn the snarling vipers in Aunt Qudsia's life into garlands with his flute, nor could he change the cow dung that enveloped her soul into sandalwood by the sheer dint of his faith. His total assets were his two trembling hands which he could use well to stifle turbulent emotions. And Aunt Qudsia, at the age of twenty-six, was fading away like a forgotten remark. She didn't even have enough courage to be like Bua and lose her sanity. At least then people would fear her. As things stood now, her Ghazi Mian was ridiculed and pitied. There are those who are more alive in death than the living.

Bua was probably just a few years older than Aunt Qudsia. From the time when she is young, a woman's heart is filled with a thousand fears so that when she reaches puberty she thinks of herself as a fragile, unbaked clay pitcher which must encounter stones at every step. But because she had lost her sanity, Bua's fears had vanished, especially her fear of losing her honor. She was no longer a hollow clay pitcher, she was a solid rock. In a manly fashion she went where she pleased, regardless of whether it was night or day. She had somehow managed to make people revere her. Nobody really knew how, but one or two miracles came about and people began to believe. Once a ruffian, finding her alone, tried to grab her. Ghazi Mian slapped him with such fury that the man's face caved in. At another time an unfortunate fellow tried to have his way with her and it is believed that the hand which he fastened upon her wrist decomposed and fell off.

Our Uncle Machu, was an apostate. He used to say, "Every year thousands of lepers throng to the shrine with hopes of being healed. Decomposition of limbs and their subsequent falling off is not a miracle, it's a disease. And it's not unusual for an alcoholic to suffer from an attack of facial paralysis."

But we were afraid of doubting Bua. What would you do if your whole face fell in and collapsed? She had the temperament of an ogress. However, ever since we had discovered that she was not a ghou! or a spirit and was only a little mad, we ceased to be terrified of her.

One day we found her standing under the oak tree, wiping mud from her slipper. I gave her Aunt Qudsia's message.

"I'm not coming," she said rudely. "I'll come when I feel like it," she muttered and walked away toward the path on the other side of the small bridge.

Finally, after a long time, she felt like it and there she was,

suddenly. Without standing on ceremony, without saying a word to anyone, she went directly to the water pitchers, poured some water into a brass cup for herself and sprinkled some on the *lambeli* buds she had tied to a corner of her *dupatta*. Then she drew the *dupatta* over her head, placed her hands on her hips like a singing girl and started smiling. Amma had always warned us that girls from good families don't stand with their hands on their hips: only singing girls do that. While you're growing up there's a time when your hands become a nuisance, you don't know what to do with them. So, driven by the fear that I might become a singing girl if I weren't careful, I would sometimes place both hands over my head when I didn't know where else to put them.

"What is this, you wretch, why are you slapping your head?" Amma scolded me, vexed.

"Where should I keep my hands then?" I would ask wearily.

"In the fire!" She'd get more upset. "Get out of here." And I would quickly slip away.

Suddenly Bua laughed. Then she came and sat down on the divan and proceeded to adjust the folds on her tight *pajama*. Her clothes were spotlessly clean. A starched pink *dupatta* was draped neatly across her shoulders while a small bunch of *lambeli* tied to a corner of the *dupatta* swung next to her cheek.

Unable to withstand her stare, Aunt Qudsia lowered her eyes and pretended to busy herself by adjusting her *dupatta* over her shoulders.

My eyes are red from weeping . . .

She seemed to be teasing Aunt Qudsia.

*Smoking, chewing pan, my beloved
My cruel beloved didn't come today
My eyes are red from weeping . . .*

Aunt Qudsia was holding her tears in the palm of her hand; she began sprinkling them. But before she could bring on an attack of hysteria, Bua leapt up and was gone out the back door in seconds.

Her voice glided in the distance: *My eyes are red from weeping . . .*

Everyone was impressed. Bua had knowledge of hidden things, she knew how to handle Aunt Qudsia.

"She must have heard it from somebody," Uncle Machu said. He was an apostate, you see. But no one paid any attention to his remark.

After this episode Bua became a frequent visitor to our house. She'd come, sit down, and if she felt restive she'd just get up and leave.

"Come, stay," Aunt Qudsia coaxed.

"No, no I can't . . . he'll be waiting for me . . ."

And I'd imagine Ghazi Mian actually standing under the shade of the *kadamb* tree, waiting for her.

"She's lost her wits, the unfortunate creature, and what a good family she's from."

"You know, she doesn't look demented to me."

"Why, you'll think she's demented only after she picks up stones to throw at you? Doesn't she have that low-caste woman in her house, and does she give any thought to the value of money? Anyone can come in and steal all she's got and she'll never know."

"Don't say anything about her, please, I'm not sure it's safe."

"Why, I'm not saying she's a bad person, am I?"

Once Maulvi Sahib, the village cleric, said to Bua, "You had better get married, girl. What good is it roaming around like this?"

Enraged, Bua pounced on him: "Why don't you get your mother married to some ruffian walking on the streets!"

"A woman is not safe without a man by her side," Maulvi Sahib explained.

Bua exploded: "I have a man by my side, your father's father . . . if he hears you talk like this he'll set your beard on fire."

Who could chide Ghazi Mian's cherished beloved without incurring his wrath? While returning from the well with a bucket of water one day, Maulvi Sahib's son was bitten by a snake. Maulvi Sahib's wife fell at Bua's feet, rubbed her nose on her shoes and it was only then that the boy's life was spared.

"It must be a water snake, they're not the poisonous type," Uncle Machu remarked. But who will listen to talk that threatens to damage belief? Fear of Bua grew in people's hearts. She wasn't just anybody, she was Ghazi Mian's most treasured beloved, Ghazi Mian, who made it possible for a barren woman to conceive, who healed a leper, who turned beggars to kings and kings to beggars in seconds. Was it any wonder that he was so mindful of his favorite girl?

Since she hadn't produced even a mouse as yet, the *m/m*, Aunt Qudsia was sure, was barren. Nani Bivi's fasting and prayers had surely put a lock on her fertility. Allah could change everything in no time. Nani Bivi had also made a vow at Mian's shrine that when, with Allah's grace, Qudsia's luck changed and she became pregnant, she would offer a silver

figurine at his shrine.

For three years Nani Bivi's silver cradle had been placed at Mian's feet with the entreaty, "Ghazi Mian, please bless this cradle." And along with that continued the pleas to Mighty Qadir to bring Qudsia's husband back to her. But all the vows, prayers and fasting came to naught. The cradle was blessed, but it was the *mām* who became the instrument. The day she heard the news that her rival had given birth to a daughter, Aunt Qudsia was weighed down; it seemed as if a marble tomb had been erected over her soft, newly dug grave. On the day of reckoning, the angels of death, Munkar and Nakir, would be slow to breathe life into her.

Bua, who had been absent for many days, made a sudden appearance one day. Nani Bivi was busy scolding the *saʿīs* who had arrived with sweets to offer felicitations on the occasion of the baby's birth. Tossing the *lagḡās* into the gutter, Nani Bivi threatened to shave off the *saʿī's* hair; the woman clasped her skirt about her legs and fled.

On hearing of the arrival of the baby girl, Bua began twittering.

"Listen girl, your rival's lap has been blessed, aren't you going to distribute sweets?" Then she took down the drum and broke into a medley of silly songs about childbirth.

*With bells on his ankles
the little tot will play cham, cham,
cham . . .*

There was no little tot, what cursed *cham, cham* could there be? This uncalled for singing infuriated Nani Bivi. She railed and ranted at Bua who dropped the drum, left the house and trudged off to sit behind the mosque. She was gone for many days. This was not unusual. Not caring whether it was night or day, she started off on foot, wandering from one village to another. Somewhere along the way, standing on the edge of a well to catch her breath, if she heard a new song, she'd include it in her treasure of lyrics. Then she moved on. Often she travelled without food for days. The insane have great strength. We had never seen her sleeping. She wasn't bothered either by snakes or scorpions or wild animals. In the village on the other side of the stream a lion was spotted, but it stayed out of her path. We heard rumors that the lion offered her salutations by placing its head on the ground before her.

Bua told her stories of Ghazi Mian's playfulness with such aplomb that it became difficult to doubt her word. When you live next to a shrine

everything seems to make sense. Mian was very stubborn and mischievous. He teased her always, tagging at her *dupatta*, clutching her bangles.

"Now listen, how did he fall in love with you?" Aunt Qudsia asked.

"His heart led him to me," Bua replied, smiling proudly.

"That's what I'm asking, how did his heart lead him to you?" Aunt Qudsia was always anxious to find out how one could win someone's heart. Although she had sacrificed her body, soul and everything she possessed, she had not succeeded in winning anyone's heart.

"I don't know, why don't you ask him yourself, he's standing in front of me, smiling." She pointed to a wall with her finger and all of us followed her finger fearfully. Our worldly eyes could see nothing, but for her the world around her was filled with blinding light.

"How did you meet him?"

"I was on my way to the well, to draw water, he stood in my path, blocking my way."

"And then?" We all moved closer to her.

"I tried to run, he clasped my wrist."

"And then?" We edged closer still.

"My father was very angry." She was in a world of her own already.

"He said, we won't give him our daughter, he's a boatman's son."

"A boatman's son?"

Bua explained that Mian had taken the form of a boatman's son in order to beg for her hand; he fell at her father's feet and pleaded. But her father got angry and rejected him and arranged for marriage to someone else. A terrible storm arose while the wedding party was attempting to cross the Ghagra in the middle of the night. It was Mian, transformed as the boatman and rowing their boat, who had summoned the storm. He ignored everyone else and made an attempt to save her from drowning, but the others tried to interfere. Enraged, he tipped the boat and let everyone drown. Surrounded by flowers, Bua floated for three days on the surface of the water in her bridal clothes.

"And then?" We had moved practically into her lap by now.

"And then nothing!" Worn out, she pushed us away and left the house to wander in the cemetery in a daze, lost, singing love songs.

Bua was a virgin. No man had touched her. After the wedding procession drowned she managed somehow to get to the banks of the stream. For days she strayed in the woods. When her parents heard she was alive they came after her to take her home, but by then Bua had retreated into a world of dreams. She refused to shatter her bridal bangles;

she was a bride, and Bale Mian was her bridegroom. No one had the courage to lock horns with Bale Mian.

"He's calling me," she'd suddenly say and wander off into the woods, singing songs of love. Considering her wishes to be Bale Mian's, no one dared stop her. Gradually, as time passed, certain miracles came to be associated with her and people seemed to be more and more intimidated by her. Then they began to worship her. If someone needed to ask a favor of Mian, they all knew where to go. Wherever she went she was treated with deference, and to have the opportunity of doing something for her was regarded as a stroke of good fortune. When a prayer was answered, a pink *dapaṭā*, fragrant oil and perfume, bangles and flowers were offered at Ghazi Mian's shrine for her along with the offering that had been promised for Ghazi Mian. How much did she eat? She could stay without food for days. People filled large decorated trays with food and brought them to her house and she distributed the food among beggars. She had been living alone since the death of her parents. A low-caste woman took care of the house. The village washerwoman, who was careless with everyone else's clothes and frequently lost or misplaced laundry, washed Bua's clothes with the utmost care, making them crisp and bright. Bua owned some land, but never bothered to take any profit from it. Perhaps that was why people had begun to view her as Ghazi Mian's cherished beloved; they too cherished her. She had no reason to fear anyone, there were thousands who were ready to surrender their loves for her. Therefore, although she was a weak woman, she was not handicapped or helpless; she claimed all the rights of a man. She moved about alone as she fancied, declared her love in aloud voice, sang boisterously, made bold comments without reserve, swore unabashedly, sat in the company of men during a *qawālī*, and generously threw money to the singers.

During the annual fair at Ghazi Mian's shrine, thousands of ruffians and scoundrels trooped in along with the lakhs of pilgrims and devotees; every other day you heard about kidnappings and rapes. Upper class ladies considered it dangerous to come out even in enclosed palanquins or carriages guarded by stewards. And Bua, all the while, sailed among the crowds, without a care, her *dapaṭā* floating behind her.

"My word, Bua, the world is a dangerous place, don't go to the fair," Amma warned her. "Aren't you afraid to wander all by yourself?"

"But I don't wander by myself, I'm not alone, he's with me." In other words, *her* he.

There was no one among us who could contradict her. What could

you say? And if we said something she didn't like we'd be in trouble; who knows what miracle might follow.

"She's a degenerate, the wretch!" In the beginning Uncle Machu didn't approve of her at all. "And she's not mad either. She's just making fools of all of us."

That very night Uncle Machu suffered an attack of liver pain that left him gasping for breath. He kept insisting that he'd had a liver ailment for many years, but who was going to pay any attention to what he said. "He's an ignorant man," Amma acknowledged to Bua in an attempt to win her over. She secretly begged her to speak to Ghazi Mian on their behalf.

The pain would have subsided on its own, but Amma was sure he had been cured because of Bua's intervention. And she warned Uncle Machu that if he ever said another unfavorable word concerning Bua again she would beat her head with her hands. What did he have to lose? He had no children and no God, while she, on the other hand, by God's grace, was a mother and could not afford to antagonize anyone. As for Abba, she had already sworn that if he said anything hostile with regard to Bua he would surely see his wife dead. Abba had often maintained that this business of believing in saints and their followers was a sinful undertaking. But Amma's family was dearer to her than any concerns about the next life.

When our friendship with Bua grew it seemed as if we'd come to terms with God; because of Bua we felt as if we too had some connection with Ghazi Mian. Sometimes when she was in a good mood she spent the night at our house and all of us quarreled for the opportunity to sleep with her on the same bed. She exuded a wonderful fragrance, a fragrance of soft smelling, freshly dug earth. When, after several days of absence, her voice floating in song reached our ears, we became frantic with excitement and ran to fetch her. Like ants we clung to her and dragged her home. The very same voice which used to strike fear in our hearts now fell on our ears with the magic of an ancient melody.

As soon as she stepped into the house, everything brightened and came to life. The drum vibrated:

*Ho my prince, bring me some medicine
from Delhi
So I can be cured.*

She sang the new songs she had picked up.

*The rains are here
My brother, will you not put up the
swing?*

Dark clouds swirled, rain drops fell, young hearts stirred with emotions, flames smoldered in Aunt Qudsia's eyes. Who was going to put up a swing? Aunt Qudsia became dizzy and nauseated when she saw anyone swinging. But Bua brought a length of rope from somewhere, we made a swing, and with a pillow for a seat we swung high and low. Bua sang long, high notes and Aunt Qudsia, from her place on the divan, joined in:

*My heart yearns, the clouds pour,
My friend, how will I endure these days of
spring . . .*

Sitting at a distance Uncle Shabbir stared at the floor like a criminal, as though he had a hand in making the clouds pour and the heart yearn, as if Aunt Qudsia's spring had soured because of him. Qudsia belonged to someone else, she was forbidden fruit. Secretly he consulted *mawlas*, talked to lawyers, but we're talking of the time when the Khula Bill hadn't been passed. At first no one thought of divorce because of the fear of bringing dishonor to the family. Then, after some of the rebels in the family had succeeded in bringing Nani Bivi around to the idea of divorce, Aunt Qudsia's husband stubbornly refused to give in.

Rejecting our world, Bua had created a free world of her own where she ruled. She had sealed all doors but after all she was a woman; a chink remained somewhere. We became very fond of her and sometimes affectionately made obstinate demands; when she got ready to leave we clung to her tearfully, forcing her to turn back.

"Bua, these silly children are crazy about you, why don't you take them with you?" Amma would say, and Bua would cancel her trip.

If she weren't demented, Bua was fit to be weighed in gold. She had started helping out with the household chores. Cleaning was her particular obsession. Furnished with an army of kids, she went about tidying up and threw out baskets full of rubbish. If only she could come with us back to our hometown after Abba's retirement.

"Can't she be cured?" Amma asked Hakim Sahib who used to be called in to treat Aunt Qudsia. He came to our house once or twice every week.

"Of course she can, Begum Sahib. There is no ailment in this world for which medicine doesn't have a remedy. Start giving her a laxative and, God willing, her mind will return to its normal state."

Hakim Sahib had only one medicine for every ailment: Laburnum putgative. When Aunt Qudsia felt unwell, it was this very laxative that was administered to her. Not only did you feel that your life was slipping away but your body also seemed to be threatened by the effects of these laxatives. She had no recourse but to be cured and for days afterward she was afraid to even blink an eyelash for fear that it might be mistaken for an oncoming attack and people might rush with treatment. Uncle Machu too had been given these laxatives for the pain in his liver. After the first dose he threatened to kill Hakim Sahib.

"The heat from the body travels to the brain. Purging the stomach helps get rid of all noxious matter." Hakim Sahib proceeded to throw light on the advantages of purgative therapy and everyone was convinced. Bua, however, ignored his advice.

—*Translated by Tahira Naqvi*

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Zubān-e Urdū-e Mu'allā and the Idol of Linguistic Origins¹

IDENTIFYING A LANGUAGE as a bounded entity to be located in dictionaries, grammar books, a literary canon and, most important, a "community" of human beings who can be counted and located on a map—all these are developments that emerged in nineteenth-century India and distort our understanding of earlier times. Naming one such language "Urdu" was itself an historical event in this process. It is a name that took some time to enter common usage and in certain quarters has remained problematic. What counts as Urdu as opposed to Hindi, Hindi-Urdu, Hirdi, Hindustani, Hindusthani and a number of so-called languages, dialects and speech varieties has been a matter of highly charged controversy for a long time.

The Turkish word *urdū*, as a military encampment, appears in Indo-Muslim texts from the middle of the twelfth century. Babar in the sixteenth century refers to his own *urdū-e mu'allā*, the exalted camp. But the word is not explicitly associated with language until the middle of the eighteenth century. It was then that Arzu, Mir and others began to use phrases like *zubān-e urdū-e lāhī*,² *zubān-e urdū-e mu'allā*, or, more modestly, *mufāwara-e urdū-e mu'allā*—the idiom of the exalted camp. And only at the end of the century do scholars begin to find scattered references to the word *urdū* alone as a metonym for a language, which is still more usually called Hindi.³ The idea that one could name a language

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the South Asia Conference, University of Wisconsin, November 1, 1991.

² Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 332.

³ T. Grahame Bailey, "Urdu: The Name and the Language," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1930: 391–400.

"military camp" had a built-in ambiguity, which comes out in the floundering attempts of the early British grammarians to locate the language and decide what it was and what it could be used for. Was it a lingua franca, a "jargon" associated with the large, dispersed military bands that so pervaded the Indian scene, a language of bazaars? Or was it, as Gilchrist argued, the real spoken language of respectable people, in the British sense, and an admirable literature?⁴

But this name 'Urdu' became in later years an allusion to past time, and an interpretation of it—specifically to Mughal India. From the Parsi theater, the plays of Agha Hashr Kashmiri, the films of Sohrab Modi and others, most notably K.K. Asif's *Mughal-e azam*, what counts as Urdu for many people is bound up with images of Akbar, Jahangir, Nur Jahan and Anarkali. My own interest, as an historian of more recent times, is in these processes of cultural construction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this paper, however, I will offer a brief speculation about the nature of language and society in relation to the cultural authority of the Mughal regime.

Most immediately, this paper is a response to Amrit Rai's book, *A House Divided: The Origins and Development of Hindi-Urdu*, first published in 1984 and recently reissued in paperback.⁵ A contemporary Hindi writer and critic, Rai's book is above all an impassioned polemic that urges writers of both Hindi and Urdu to draw upon the widest possible concept of the Hindi-Urdu past as a literary heritage. To put this another way, Rai's book is a contribution to the narrative of the nation, with special emphasis on what is perceived to be the tragedy of Hindu-Muslim division and the calamity of partition. In this account the formation of Urdu as language, literature and community was a highly regrettable event, and the villains of the piece, the agents of the bifurcation of a unified linguistic entity, properly called Hindi, are to be found, not among the British colonizers, but rather among people associated with the Mughal court in its period of decline, the eighteenth century.

As a work of philological scholarship Rai's book, though rich in detail and helpful in guiding the reader to other sources and providing lengthy extracts for easy reference, leaves much to be desired. Insofar as there is an academic grounding to his work, however, it is to be found in

⁴I have discussed this in a recent paper, "Colonial Knowledge and the Fate of Hindustani," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (forthcoming).

⁵Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

As a work of philological scholarship Rai's book, though rich in detail and helpful in guiding the reader to other sources and providing lengthy extracts for easy reference, leaves much to be desired. Insofar as there is an academic grounding to his work, however, it is to be found in a much older book by a distinguished linguist, Sumit Kumar Chatterji's *Indo-Aryan and Hindi*, first published in 1942. What Rai does is to repeat and elaborate on Chatterji's basic argument.

According to so-called genetic linguistics, the philological tradition that Chatterji belonged to, languages are natural, organic systems whose synchronic features and diachronic developments are to be understood according to scientific principles. The component sub-systems of any language, particularly phonology, morphology and syntax, but also a core lexicon and—for Rai—even the script, all exist and change according to the internal dynamics of what is essentially a self-contained entity. Both Chatterji and Rai rely on literary texts, above all *bhakti* poetry, as the data for their historical reconstructions, but these are taken as just that—data, evidence of what is referred to as natural language and how it was varied over time and space. Poets, or anyone else for that matter, are at most agents of diffusion, moving linguistic features from one territory to another. In this process whatever variation one finds remains constrained by the underlying structures of the language. What is unnatural, according to this theoretical position, is for an event to take place, for conscious human agents to intrude upon this linguistic aquarium, motivated by considerations that are extraneous to the internal principles of language in itself. Such intrusions create utterances that are called "artificial."⁶ Artificial is by definition illegitimate.

According to Chatterji and Rai there is a body of mystic, devotional and lyric poetry from the eleventh to the seventeenth century that provides evidence of linguistic unity reaching through the whole of northern India and well into the South, a unity that was itself heir to the alleged prominence of Sauraseni Apabhramsa in a still earlier era. Phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical variation in these widely dispersed texts were not substantial enough to undermine this unity, but are evidence of the wide geographical movements of *bhakti* and

⁶See Sarah Grey Thomason and Terrence Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization, and Generative Linguistics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 1–12; Sumit Kumar Chatterji, *Indo-Aryan and Hindi* (Ahmadabad: Gujarat Vernacular Society, 1942).

much of the book is filled with quotations without accompanying discussion of what linguistic features he wants us to look at or whether the texts are in fact an accurate documentation of whatever linguistic points he might want to make.

The crucial turning point in Rai's narrative, the founding event in what he calls "the cultural divide," is the familiar story of the poet Vali arriving in Delhi from Aurangabad in about 1702. Although the emperor Aurangzeb had long established his imperial headquarters in Aurangabad, Delhi remained the cultural capital of the empire. At this point, Vali's poetry, like that of his Dakani predecessors, drew freely on Indic sounds, words and, to some extent, themes. Rai makes a point of arguing that Dakani, often called Hindi at the time, was indeed part of the unified field of language and literature that he has demarcated for the previous centuries. But in Delhi, so the story goes, Vali was taken aside by Shah Gulshan and told to change his poetry, to make the language conform to the language of the *urdu-e mu'alla*, the exalted cantonment, of Shahjahanabad, that is, Delhi. Shah Gulshan also advised him to confine himself to themes and images of the Persian literary tradition.

What follows is what Rai calls, in capitals, "the Language Reform Movement," led by an "Irani lobby" in Delhi. Vali returned to Delhi about 1720, a few years after the Mughal court had shifted back from the south. By all accounts his new poems created immense excitement and stimulated much imitation. There were numerous *musabihas*, poems were memorized, copied, widely dispersed. The institution of *ustād* and *ilgird* was extended to the new style of poetry: teachers corrected the work of their pupils, schools of poets engaged in controversies over matters of imagery and diction. Shah Harim, who according to Garcin de Tassy wrote out a list of his numerous disciples, including Sauda,⁷ purged his earlier *divān* of "all indigenous Hindi and Braj Bhaka words." His revised *divān*, called *Divān-e-ada*, son of *divān*, included rules that Arabic and Persian words, if "near to comprehension," should always be used in preference to "Hindavi" or "Bhaka" ones. Poetic language should conform to "the usage of Delhi, which are the idiom of the Mirzas of India and the pleasure-seeking men of culture." Rai then jumps ahead to a later generation and quotes Nasikh: "As long as you find Persian and

⁷Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la littérature hindoue et hindoustani*, reprint of second ed. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968) II, pp. 588–592; cf. Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 37–38.

dīwān, called *Dīwānāda*, son of *dīwān*, included rules that Arabic and Persian words, if "near to comprehension," should always be used in preference to "Hindavi" or "Bhaka" ones. Poetic language should conform to "the usage of Delhi, which are the idiom of the Mirzas of India and the pleasure-seeking men of culture." Rai then jumps ahead to a later generation and quotes Nasikh: "As long as you find Persian and Arabic words that serve the purpose, do not use Hindi words." Nasikh represents a further development, according to Rai, because as a resident of Lucknow and not Delhi he had to compensate all the more for his unfamiliarity with the ways of the Mughal court.

The final stage in this narrative of linguistic conspiracy is Insha's *Daryā-e Layāfat*, written in 1808, a work in Persian on the grammar and diction of what he calls, simply, Urdu. Insha starts out by asserting that any country has a center which sets cultural standards, and the center of Hindustan is Delhi under the auspices of the royal court.⁸ People from outside Delhi, from places like Faridabad and Meerut, fail to meet the same standards of excellence; their language is like "an animal with the face of a man and the body of an ass." Even in Delhi the language of most people is substandard, for example, the Bārha Sayyids and the residents of Mughalpara. In fact, a survey of the peculiar speech forms of the *mohallas* of Delhi reveals that most of them fail to reach the level of *ḥaḥḥat*, that is, eloquence or correct usage. Only in the three localities, the royal fort and a short list of selected houses and streets could one encounter an adequate linguistic standard. Rai comments indignantly, "Now if this is not a class dialect one should like to know what it is."⁹

But worst of all, Insha states flat out that Urdu is the language of Muslims. It is this language that later Muslim leaders were to demand as the language of instruction and official business in British India. From this Rai jumps ahead to the clincher of his argument, a quotation from the *Bābā-e Urfā*, Abdul Haqq, in 1961 after he had moved to Pakistan: "It was Urdu," he said, "that created Pakistan."

Although there are a number of problems with Rai's account, at this point I would just like to point out the way that he misreads, I think, Insha's text. He misses the playfulness, the satire behind *Daryā-e Layāfat*

⁸Sayyid Inā' Allāh Xān Inā', *Daryā-e Layāfat*, tr. into Urdu by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf 'Urūj, reprint ed. (Karachi: Ālīyah Academy, 1962), p. 22.

⁹Rai, *op. cit.*, p. 257; but I find a somewhat different list in the edition I am using on pp. 42–43.

he starts *Daryā-e Laqāʿat* by claiming, perhaps tongue in cheek, that under the auspices of the royal court, Urdu has been created by selecting the best words from different languages and putting them together into something new. He goes on to discuss how to alter Persian script in order to represent the retroflexes, aspirations and nasalizations of Hindi words. His complaints about the language of people who live in Mughalpurā is that they say *ṣalek* for *ṣak* and call a father's younger brother *ṣaḥḥ*. This shows that they have been influenced too much by Hindus.¹¹ I think this is intended to be funny, for the work in general is a witty collection of miscellaneous observations about a wide variety of local pronunciations, odd idioms, proverbial sayings, the speech of men and women of various sorts and conditions. The work wasn't published until 1849 and not translated from Persian into Urdu until 1916. I don't think it caused the partition of India.

What it does represent is the linguistic and literary curiosity that characterized the first century of Urdu as a full blown literary language. Rai is certainly right that this great outpouring of poetry in Urdu alongside other languages, especially Persian, was bound explicitly to cultural ideals associated with the Mughal court, the *ahl-e suḥḥ*, the people of the language. But with effort and talent one could try to emulate the perfections of their speech, although an outsider will never quite get it right. It was for this reason that Mushafī, Inṣhā and others came to Delhi: they wanted to learn this language directly from the *ahl-e suḥḥ* or, as Inṣhā also put it, the *ṣaḥḥān-e ṣaḥḥān-o-baḥḥān*.¹²

Rai raises the question of why this highly developed concept of Urdu arose at the very time of Mughal decline. In the first two centuries of Mughal rule, the literary language of the court was overwhelmingly Persian, and the relatively few instances of court writing in what could be called Hindi tended to be song lyrics in Braj. He argues that the Persian of the Mughals, judged by Irani standards, was inferior (though this is based in part on Rai's misunderstanding of the provenance of the *ṣaḥḥ-e hindī*). Only in the Dak(h)in sultanates was there extensive courtly interest in an indigenous, "vernacular" literature. What Valī and his successors represent is the effort to create a Hindi that would retain as much as possible of the Persian literary tradition. Rai sees this as the last desperate grasp of a declining ruling class, now too far removed from Irani ties to retain a mastery of Persian but unwilling to break away from the

¹¹Inṣhā, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 42; on pronunciation, see p. 47 and 56.

of the Mughals, judged by Irani standards, was inferior (though this is based in part on Rai's misunderstanding of the provenance of the *ṣabṭ-e hindī*). Only in the Dak(h)in sultanates was there extensive courtly interest in an indigenous, "vernacular" literature. What Vali and his successors represent is the effort to create a Hindi that would retain as much as possible of the Persian literary tradition. Rai sees this as the last desperate grasp of a declining ruling class, now too far removed from Irani ties to retain a mastery of Persian but unwilling to break away from the dominance of the Indo-Persian tradition. Urdu, then, was a compromise between bad Persian and a minimal smattering of the "real" language of India, Hindi.

Such remarks are by no means new, even, as Rai shows, among Urdu literary historians. One may respond by discussing the aesthetics of Indo-Persian literature and its transformations into Urdu, by questioning the ideology of authenticity and realism that Rai stand for, or by showing the greater range and variation in Urdu literary theory and practice. One might also question the concept that one can locate the origins of language and, having done so, morally evaluate an entire linguistic history on that basis; or that a language's basic integrity as a system must not be violated by excessive intrusions from other languages.

Instead I would like to consider the circumstances of what is unarguable in his account: the emergence of Urdu as a major literary language in the eighteenth century and its association with the speech of the Mughal court. To do this let me resort briefly to an old ploy, one that goes back to Gilchrist and Beames: a brief discussion of the early history of English. This turns out to be a complex and controversial subject—no doubt because there are many more people in English departments, even in South Asia—but I will rely on only one account to make my point, the work of Sarah Grey Thomason and Terrence Kaufman.¹³

Though English emerged in a much smaller country with a much smaller population, there is a complex history of Germanic and Old Norse migrations and invasions, and a wide variety of dialects. By the tenth century, there had developed a fairly widespread literary language in southern England that included features of several local dialects but was dominated by the language of Winchester. Then the Norman French conquered the country in the middle of the eleventh century, speaking themselves more than one variety of a recently acquired French. For a

¹³Thomason and Kaufman, *op. cit.*, pp. 263–331.

borrowed, however, were French words and not much else. There was a smattering of other changes, like the suffix *-able* which could be added freely to an English root, as in "edible." There were hardly any phonological changes; French words were altered to fit English pronunciations. And there were no syntactic changes as a result of the contact with French. The literary influence, however, in genre, theme and style was substantial. Much later, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was again a large importation of foreign vocabulary, at least into written English, but this time it was Latin and had nothing to do with conquerors, immigrants or even a living speech community.

A situation like this, in which only words and occasional particles are imported into a language, tells us something about the linguistic competences of the people doing the importing. It would appear that they have a full command of the target language, the language on the receiving end, and probably a less intimate command of the source. Otherwise there would be more substantial "interference" in other aspects of the language. Such was the case with the Norman French aristocrats to whom English owes its French; phonological or morphological influence would have been limited to people who had more direct contact with French, but even such contact was likely to be with teachers and books rather than more diffuse social interactions. The later English literati who adopted Latin words had to do so entirely from their reading.

There is, of course, a great difference between Plantagenet England and Mughal India, and I am not proposing any direct parallels. Nor, by the way, am I willing to concede Amrit Rai's concept of Urdu as simply the creation of the Mughal court. Instead, I want to use this approach to language history to see what can be found about the spoken language of the Mughal ruling class and their entourage. The makers of even the most Persianized Urdu literature were not native speakers of Persian; in fact, their Persian was the object of derision and condemnation on the part of their Irani contemporaries.¹⁴ Stephen Blake, using Athar Ali's data, has shown the sharp decline of foreign born *umara* in the reign of Aurangzeb—only sixteen out of 179 were born in Iran—but in fact the writers of Indo-Persian were never predominantly Irani in the first place.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sarfaraz Khan Khatak, *Shaikh Muhammad 'Ali Hazin: His Life, Times, and Works* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1944), pp. 36–48.

¹⁵ Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 126; see also Abdul Ghani, *A*

their Persian was the object of derision and condemnation on the part of their Irani contemporaries.¹⁴ Stephen Blake, using Athar Ali's data, has shown the sharp decline of foreign born *umara'* in the reign of Aurangzeb—only sixteen out of 179 were born in Iran—but in fact the writers of Indo-Persian were never predominantly Irani in the first place.¹⁵

But what was the vernacular of the Mughal court? Before the eighteenth century it is by no means obvious what one might call the native language of the Mughal emperors, let alone the surrounding courtly milieus. The traditional family language was Turki, the language of Babar's memoirs. But even by Humayun's time, the emperor only used it when he didn't want others to understand the conversation.¹⁶ Akbar's wet-nurse and so-called foster family were Turki speaking, and he wanted his son Salim to learn proper Turki. But then he also wanted Murad to learn Portuguese. Abdur Rahim Khan-e Khana, a second generation Turani, also studied some Portuguese and wrote extensively in both Persian and Braj.¹⁷ Persian, of course, was the language of the highest cultivation in court, but except for the native-born Iranis, Stephen Blake tell us, it was not a first language.¹⁸ Was there anything that could be

¹⁴Sarfraz Khan Khatak, *Shahksh Muhammad 'Ali Husain: His Life, Times, and Works* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1944), pp. 36–48.

¹⁵Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 126; see also Abdul Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court* (Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1926, 1930), 3 vols.; David Lelyveld, "Eloquence and Authority in Urdu: Poetry, Oratory, and Film," in Katherine Ewing, ed., *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 98–113. Note the opening words of Muhammad Hussain Azad, who was from an Irani family that migrated to Delhi in the late eighteenth century, in his *Ab-e Hayat* (reprint ed. Faizabad Book Suppliers, n.d. [1966]), p. 9. On the continuing importance of Irani migration see J.R.L. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 81. As noted above, Insha comments on the accents of people who have migrated from Iran and elsewhere (pp. 47, 56).

¹⁶Ghani, *op. cit.*, part II, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷John Correia-Alonzo, ed., *Letters from the Mughal Court: The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar (1580–1583)* (Bombay: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1980), pp. 83, 111; Ghani, Part III, pp. 120–129.

¹⁸Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

received and recited in their own times.

Writers like the great court poet of Bijapur, Nusrati, in the introduction to one of his *magmas* tells us that on one festive evening he was sitting with his friends. One of them remarked how rich the literature of Persian had been, and, in contrast, how poor the writers of the Deccan are. It was therefore suggested that Nusrati, being a man of letters and influence (he represented his Bijapur patron as envoy to Golkonda), should turn his attention to emulating Anvari and Khaqani. He took up the challenge and the result was a fine *magmas* of tolerable length, which might very well have been read or recited during the long moonlit nights, when courtiers had the leisure to listen once more to versions of the old romances.

But who would have the leisure, who would have had the patience to plough through the 200,000 verses of *Kāvernāma*, a long, tedious account of the exploits of Alī, now housed in the India Office Library?

A mystery is a manuscript of the British Library, entitled *Pem Nem*. Its beautiful calligraphy and fine miniatures make it one of the treasures of the collection. The work was composed in the year 999 AH/1590 CE in Bijapur during the reign of Ibrahim Adil Shah II. These facts are clearly stated by the author in his preface and conclusion. The long introduction, among other things, contains some fascinating insights into the life and activities of the Bijapur court, lavish descriptions of the city and its festivals. The story which forms the bulk of the work concerns the love of the hero Shah jī for his heroine Mah jī. The details of how the lovers meet, become separated, do curious things with holy men and tortoises, and then meet again to live happily ever after do not concern us here.

One of the most striking features of the work is its language. The gist of the text can be understood with a little patience; the grammar, syntax and meaning of many verses defy interpretation. What on earth can be made of lines like these:

karak kartjen kar ri karhat
kārti khaṇ khaṇ khar khar kharkhat
sah jal bal pal pal tal mal
pem pāyā man munh aḥ⁸

Such verses are typical of the whole work.

The *Pem Nem* was written in an age when Sufis like Burhanuddin

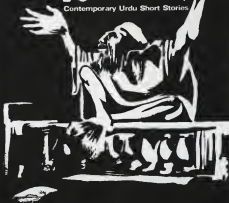
⁸*Pem Nem*, fol. 50.

some of them could have aspired to anything like *mirzāʾī*.²¹ The language transactions that took place over large territories and involving great populations are surely matters of great complexity but must have much to do with whatever form of speech developed over a long period of time at the highest levels of the Mughal regime. By the eighteenth century there was apparently a speech variety particularly associated with the ruling circles of Delhi, and from this came the concept of a *zabān-e arāḍ-e muʾalla*, as an ideal of cultivated speech and literary virtuosity. But as Insha showed, even for Delhi, there were numerous other varieties for different people and different uses. The more you knew the better.

²¹Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Navkar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 3; for the cultural heterogeneity of the Mughal ruling class, see also Douglas E. Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 123–153, 178–181.

THE TALE of the Old Fisherman

Contemporary Urdu Short Stories



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Eighty Years of Dakani Scholarship

DAKANI, THE FORM OF URDU which as the term implies was written and developed in the kingdoms of the medieval Deccan, is still widely spoken, though now rarely written, over a large area of southern India, and during the last eighty years or so its literature has attracted the attention of many modern scholars and historians. The language which is generally referred to by the blanket term *qadīm urdū* (old Urdu)¹ grew up in and around Delhi after the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE, and rapidly developed into a convenient lingua franca of the area. It was, however, Persian which persisted as the major literary medium, and in the early period, apart from a few scattered and often garbled quotations in the hagiographies of the Sufis, we have little evidence for the use of vernacular. It is popularly believed that the fourteenth century poet Amir Khusrāo composed some of his verse in it, and that his contemporary Ghusn Daraz, who eventually arrived in the Deccan to spread the word of Islam, composed works in both Dakani prose and verse, but since there is no way to prove their authenticity, such theories should probably be discounted. Stray sentences in the *maṣnawī* of the Sufis, however, give us a clear indication that the language was used during their time.

The early speakers of this developing language probably had little concept of its nature, and referred to it by a plethora of Persian names: *hindī*, *hindavī* (i.e., Indian), *zabān-e dīlī* (the speech of Delhi), and when it eventually spread as a common tongue to Gujarat and the Deccan, the geographical terms *gujratī* and *dakani* came to be applied to it. Although some scholars would have us believe that these terms refer to separate

¹ Writers of the 16th and 17th centuries refer to their language by a number of names: *zabān-dīlīyā*, *hindī*, *hindavī*, etc. The term *dakani* or *dakānī* is probably first attested in the *maṣnawī*, *Qissa-e Bēnadr* of San'atī (Bijapur 1645).

languages, when we look at the texts, apart from certain local words and grammatical characteristics, there is essentially no great difference among them.

The development of language as a literary medium outside the capital was at first a Sufi enterprise. In Delhi, the preachers could comfortably use Persian; when they went farther afield to the west and the south, they were obliged to use a vernacular understood by the common people whom they tried to instruct in the ways of Islam.

Their works, which began to appear in written form from roughly the middle of the fifteenth century, are almost entirely religious and very serious in tone. Some of the Sufis naturally found it difficult to cope with a language whose rules were as yet uncodified, and rather endearingly apologize for the fact that their writing is so inept. Although, as we saw, their language is essentially the same, styles and vocabulary can differ widely.

There are two main reasons for this: first, the long distance they traveled meant that they would spend lengthy periods of time in various linguistic regions, and would naturally be influenced by local speech; second, a discerning preacher would have to consider the kind of audience he was addressing. Non-converted Hindus would require the kind of words with which they were familiar from their own religious texts; those who were already acquainted with the basic tenets of Islam could cope with more complicated technical terms.

The later Bijapur Sufi, Burhanuddin Janam (c. 1560) can sometimes write verse employing a large number of Sanskrit, Marathi and Hindi dialect words; other poems are replete with Persian and Arabic.

Although we have no evidence for linguistic or literary debate at that time (and the contemporary Persian historians remained blissfully ignorant of any other language but their own), such debate must have taken place, and over a hundred years or so the Dakani works exhibit growing refinement.

The first text of whose authenticity we can be sure, like the short poem composed on the subject of Karbala by the Ahmadnagar Sufi, Ashraf (1503),² or the religious verses of Miran ji, who flourished in Bijapur towards the end of the fifteenth century, are rough and ready compositions, and, although generally comprehensible, do not exhibit many obscurities.³

²Nagiruddin Halimi, *Dakan meñ Urdu* (Lucknow, 1963), p. 231.

³Miran Ji's works can safely be dated to the first half of the 15th century.

The works of Miran ji's son, Burhanuddin Janam, one of whose latest compositions is firmly dated 1582, are much more elegant and regular.⁴

Thus by the end of the sixteenth century we have a language which could be used for comparatively sophisticated writing.

At this period, two dynamic rulers divided the Deccan between them—Ibrahim Adil Shah II, the king of Bijapur, and Muhammad Quli Quth Shah, the Sultan of Golkonda and founder of the city of Hyderabad. Both were great builders, and both were writers in their own language—Dakani.

Ibrahim, renowned for his eccentricities, chose to compose songs for which he himself chose *rāgas*; Muhammad Quli, an amorous and romantic king, preferred the Persian-style *ghazal*, and his *divān* is one of the first substantial collections of secular Urdu poetry. What is important from the point of view of Dakani literature is that these two rulers and their successors extended their patronage to other writers, and in the course of the seventeenth century, before the Deccan kingdoms were annexed by Aurangzeb, a vast amount of poetry and even a certain amount of prose was produced under the auspices of the courts. In general, Persian models were followed and, as in later Urdu literature, the love lyric (*ghazal*) and the verse romance (*maghaz*) were the most popular genres. Some of the *maghaz*s could run into well over a hundred thousand lines.

Before examining some of the major features of this literature, we should turn our attention to its "rediscovery" and to the developments in Dakani scholarship, which came into being at the beginning of this century.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the capital Delhi became the natural center for Urdu poets who sought court patronage, and about this time a rather shadowy figure, named Vali, arrived on the scene. His exact provenance and dates are not known for sure, but he seems to have spent the early part of his life in the Deccan. He is usually credited with being the instigator of the Urdu tradition in the north, and earlier literary historians imagined him to have been the first great Urdu poet. The Dakani period had almost entirely been forgotten and its literature,

They are discussed at some length in M. Akbaruddin Siddiqi, *Istiadnama* (Hyderabad, 1956).

⁴Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

perhaps because its archaic and regional style was not to the taste of those of the north, remained neglected.

In his catalogue of Hindustani manuscripts in the British Museum and the India Office Library (1899-1916), J.F. Blumhardt mentions briefly a number of important Dakani works, but his entries made little impression on contemporary Indian scholars, who still persisted in their belief that it was Vali who began the whole literary process.

One of the first researchers to turn his mind to the large corpus was Maulvi Abdul Haqq, whose untiring efforts in almost every domain of Urdu language and literature earned him the well-deserved title *Baba-e Urdu* (The Father of Urdu). Abdul Haqq was a prolific writer, and his studies of the early Sufis, his essays, his textual commentaries and his linguistic treatises still remain standard works. Perhaps his greatest monument is his English-Urdu dictionary, which to this day remains unsurpassed as a work of lexicography.

Abdul Haqq's appointment to the *Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu* at Aurangabad gave him a unique opportunity to discover past treasures, one of which was the *Kulliyat* of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, which he briefly described in the journal, *Risala-e Urdu*, in 1912.⁵

This priceless manuscript, which bore the signature of Muhammad Quli's successor, was discovered in the Asifiyya (now State Central) Library of Hyderabad, from which it promptly disappeared before it could be edited.

According to Abdul Haqq, it contained something in the region of 30,000 verses, with poetry in Urdu, Persian and Telugu. This statement may not be completely accurate, since there seems to be no evidence that the king knew Telugu, but tragically we shall probably never know. Rumor has it that the manuscript was taken to the Nizam's palace and now lies in a heap of dust, ravaged by termites.

Fortunately two other incomplete manuscripts, containing only 4,000 Urdu verses, are extant in the Salar Jung Museum of Hyderabad, and were edited by Muhiuddin Qadir Zor, the doyen of Dakani studies, in 1940.

Many of these early scholars, like Abdul Haqq and Zor, who had a vast knowledge of their subject, worked alarmingly fast and perhaps should have taken a little more care.

Zor, himself a native of the Deccan, and therefore one acquainted

⁵ Abdul Haqq, *Kulliyat-e Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah*, in *Risala-e Urdu*, July 1912.

with the local dialect (which to this day retains some of the archaic idioms and vocabulary which were lost in the north) contributed a great deal to all aspects of the subject. He was highly respected as a promulgator of the literature of his own people and in present-day Hyderabad no one will hear a word said against him. Since he worked as a pioneer, however, there were bound to be blemishes in his publications, for which he cannot necessarily be blamed. None of his successors has done even half as well.

In a series of splendidly produced texts, the "*Sibila-e Yānuṣfiya*,"⁶ financed by the Nizam, many Dakani texts were edited for the first time. The printed books are beautiful, but the texts themselves leave a great deal to be desired. Too many sentences remain garbled, indicating that the editors did not take sufficient trouble to decipher the manuscripts they had in front of them; glossaries usually contain only the more common words, most of which can be found in Platt's Oxford dictionary. The more obscure words, which with some effort can be found elsewhere, are frequently omitted.

Brief mention be made of the series "*Qadīm Urdū*,"⁷ which under the direction of the linguist and scholar Mas'ud Husain Khan was produced in the 1960's. Here the standard of textual criticism was much higher than in previous works. As a paragon, he worked with others on the first large scale Dakani dictionary, which unfortunately, because of a short deadline imposed by the Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy, had to be rushed through the press and thus remains very incomplete.

Scholars in Pakistan, who have at their disposal the wealth of manuscripts housed in the library of the Karachi *Anjuman-e Taragqi-e Urdū*, have also worked to great effect. One of the most distinguished, Jamil Jalibi, who, like most others in the field, has been far too hasty with the publications and editions, recently produced one of the fullest accounts of the literary history of the medieval period.

The obvious problem in dealing with such material is that one needs to possess a bewildering number of languages and skills, and editing a seventeenth-century text consisting of thousands of verses really demands teamwork, an idea to which many scholars do not readily lend themselves.

Dakani writers were immensely prolific, if not prolix, and we unfortunately have little information on the way their works were

⁶The series of Dakani texts, which included the *Kulliyāt* of Muḥammad Qulī (ed., M.Q. Zūr, 1940) ran occasionally from mid-thirties to the late fifties.

⁷Ed. M. H. Khan, Osmaniya University (Hyderabad), 1963-1969.

received and recited in their own times.

Writers like the great court poet of Bijapur, Nusrati, in the introduction to one of his *magnavā* tells us that on one festive evening he was sitting with his friends. One of them remarked how rich the literature of Persian had been, and, in contrast, how poor the writers of the Deccan are. It was therefore suggested that Nusrati, being a man of letters and influence (he represented his Bijapur patron as envoy to Golkonda), should turn his attention to emulating Anvari and Khaqani. He took up the challenge and the result was a fine *magnavā* of tolerable length, which might very well have been read or recited during the long moonlit nights, when courtiers had the leisure to listen once more to versions of the old romances.

But who would have the leisure, who would have had the patience to plough through the 200,000 verses of *Xāvarnāma*, a long, tedious account of the exploits of Ali, now housed in the India Office Library?

A mystery is a manuscript of the British Library, entitled *Pem Nem*. Its beautiful calligraphy and fine miniatures make it one of the treasures of the collection. The work was composed in the year 999 AH/1590 CE in Bijapur during the reign of Ibrahim Adil Shah II. These facts are clearly stated by the author in his preface and conclusion. The long introduction, among other things, contains some fascinating insights into the life and activities of the Bijapur court, lavish descriptions of the city and its festivals. The story which forms the bulk of the work concerns the love of the hero Shah ji for his heroine Mah ji. The details of how the lovers meet, become separated, do curious things with holy men and tortoises, and then meet again to live happily ever after do not concern us here.

One of the most striking features of the work is its language. The gist of the text can be understood with a little patience; the grammar, syntax and meaning of many verses defy interpretation. What on earth can be made of lines like these:

karah karjan kar ri karkat
kāri khar khar khar khar khar khar
rah jal bal pal pal tal mal
pem payā man muth al⁸

Such verses are typical of the whole work.

The *Pem Nem* was written in an age when Sufis like Burhanuddin

⁸*Pem Nem*, fol. 50.

Janam (incidentally the *pir* and *murid* of the author of the *Pem Nem*) were beginning to write eminently comprehensible Dakani. It was also a time when, under the patronage of Ibrahim and Muhammad Quli, writers were refining and regularizing their language and style.

If we are right in assuming that the *Pem Nem* was composed for the royal court of Bijapur—and the care lavished upon the manuscript by the unknown scribe and artists suggests that this was the case—then what sort of audience would have read or listened to such obscure lines?

Another interesting thing about the *Pem Nem* is that it was erroneously described by Blumhardt in his Hindi catalogue as a version of the *Padmavatī*⁹ story, and thus it never came to the attention of scholars like Nasiruddin Hashmi, whose excellent pioneering work *Dakan meṁ Urdu* (Urdu in the Deccan) still remains a classic.

Blumhardt, who also perhaps took on more than is possible for one man, was misled by a hastily read verse:

nem yāh astut sah jī jān
*dhām gun sāgar ratan khaṇ*¹⁰

which can in fact be clearly interpreted as:

This section is in praise of Shah jī.
A blessed sea of qualities (*gun sāgar*), a
mine of jewels (*ratan khaṇ*).

The last two words of the verse obviously suggested to Blumhardt the interpretation: *ratan* = *ratan sen* (the lover of Padmavati), *khaṇ* = *khaṇṭ* (story): hence *ratan-khaṇṭ* (the story of Ratan Sen [and Padmavati]). The slight error (excusable in such a monumental work), deprived the Dakani world of possibly one of its greatest treasures for almost a century.

There are many more mysteries to solve, and of course, with the vast amount of manuscript material we have at our disposal, much of which is still tucked away unedited and gathering dust in various libraries of South Asia and Europe, we could nor have expected to have them all

⁹J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the Hindi, Punjabi and Hindustani Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum* (1895), p. 57. Part of the work is being edited by my research student, Mrs. Amir Zahra Raizvi.

¹⁰*Pem Nem*, foll. 37–39.

solved in the relatively short period during which scholars have been carrying out their research.

An accurate, authentic history of the two centuries when the Urdu language and its literature were developed far away from the place where the tongue originated is still to be written. Before this can be done, however, it is clear that much of the basic research still needs to be carried out.

We owe our tribute to people like Abdul Haqq, Mohiuddin Qadiri Zor, Blumhardt, and their contemporaries and followers who laid the foundations. It is now time for us and those who, hopefully, will follow us to look at the details with great scrutiny. I am convinced that so much more could have been revealed with more care, patience and, above all, cooperation.

In the following pages, I attempt to outline some of the salient features of Dakani literature, which, when one overcomes the linguistic problems, can favorably compare with that produced by later Urdu writers. I do this by sampling passages from three poets whose work can be regarded as typical. The extracts are given in English translation, with references to the original texts given in the notes.

The first extract from Burhanuddin Janam's short discourse, *Manfaat ul Imān* (The Benefit of the Faith),¹¹ is written in clear, simple Dakani, and the general clarity and regularity of the poem suggests that it was written some time in the latter half of the sixteenth century, towards the end of his life. The early Sufis had a very clear picture of the nature of God and the universe and usually dismissed out of hand other theories which did not conform to their own way of thinking, without taking trouble to argue the point too closely. Adjectives like "absurd," "stupid," "foolish," "wrong" are frequently used to counteract the tenets of other religions which flourished in India at the time. The Sufis, many of them charismatic elderly men, lacked nothing in energy and were prepared to travel on foot from city to city in search of converts. Burhanuddin went as far as Gujarat, adapting the style and vocabulary of his sermons to the conditions he encountered. Some of his poems, presumably aimed at Hindu audiences who would not have been conversant with Islamic terminology, are replete with Sanskrit words; others, written for the consumption of the converted, possess a large element of Arabic and Persian vocabulary. In the first two verses of the following poem, the

¹¹Ed. M.H. Syed, Allahabad University Studies, Vol. VII, Part 1, pp. 471-

Roman script words are Arabic; the others are common Hindi words:

1. *allāh vāhid sirjānār*
ye jag raḥnā raḥyā apār

2. *agā 'ālam kiya zahūr*
apar bāgīn kerī nūr

God is one and did create
This boundless world for man's estate,

He created day and night.
The whole earth came from His own
light.

The negligence has cast a net
Upon the truth which we forget.

The Prophet's path and all that's true
Is only followed by a few.

But heretics spread cunning lies
And God they fail to recognize.

Some say God is wind and air
And to such theories oft repair.

But air is empty. Can such talk
Explain the earth on which we walk?

Some say God is merely sound,
The cause of all we see around—

The Holy Book the spoken word.
Such theories, are of course absurd.

Heed not such words, beware of lies
And let the veil fall from your eyes.

For if you follow God's true way

In faith, you will not go astray.

Take a teacher who will show
The path of truth, then you will know

The secrets of the Power Divine
And you will have a faith like mine.

For Shah Burhan is full of light
His words will guide you through the
night.

In general the Sufis would have little to do with the court, preferring to set up their *khānqāhs* some way from the city. Their compositions, however, attracted the attention of the nobility, and one of Burhanuddin's followers was Ibrahim Adil Shah who ruled Bijapur from 1580 to 1618.

Ibrahim, like his contemporary, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, the founder of the city of Hyderabad, was a great patron of the arts, and in the courts of these two rather eccentric monarchs, Urdu—at that time referred to as *dakani* (the vernacular of the south)—was given great encouragement. Both Ibrahim and Muhammad Quli were great poets in their own right and their respective works provide some of the first examples of secular writing.

Both the states of Bijapur and Hyderabad, whose rulers were effectively in control of much of the South of India, were affluent and relatively peaceful, and soon began to attract eminent Persian writers who sought refuge from the political upheavals of Iran. One of the most prominent authors of the time was the historian, Firishta, to whom we are indebted for his beautifully written, if not too accurate, account of the medieval Deccan. Firishta composed in his native tongue, and like many other Persian historians was fascinated by the life of the court, but took little trouble to report on the happenings of daily life.

Ibrahim, who by accounts spoke rather indifferent Persian, chose his own vernacular for the poems collected into his work, *Kitāb-e Nauras* (The Nauras Book). The word *nauras* (the nine traditional genres of *rasas* of ancient Indian poetry) obviously pleased him. Not only did he compose his verse, heavily influenced by traditional Hindu devotional poetry, under the title, but also built a palace, called Nauras Mahal, founded a new capital, the name of which was Nauraspur (the remains

still survive), and minted coins known as *kun-e nauras* (the *kun*, a Sanskrit word for "pagoda," was a gold coin used in South India until fairly recent times).

Ibrahim's *Kiṣṭh-e Nauras*, which consists of a collection of *dihāz* and songs, set to prescribed *rāgas*, is a curious composition. As well as songs composed in praise of the Prophet, the *Panjtan* (Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan and Husain) and the saint, Gesu Daraz, we also find a number of poems devoted to Hindu gods, especially Ganesh and Sarasvati, of whom Ibrahim, as a scholar and musician, was extremely fond. And then there are verses describing his favorite possessions, such as his *saibāra*, to which he referred as Moti Khan, his favorite elephant, Atish Khan, which suffered a tragic death by drowning, and songs extolling the beauty of nature and the young women of the court, whose company he obviously enjoyed.

Ibrahim was a Muslim ruler of Shi'a persuasion, but his attachment to the Hindu *devmats* earned him the title of *Jagat Gura* (the Universal Mentor) in which he delighted. These eccentric practices of the king proved to be a matter of grave concern to the orthodox, and contemporary histories make reference to Muslim theologians who converged upon Bijapur to discuss the consequences of his unorthodox way of life. Many of the stories, like the one concerning Shah Abul Hasan Qadiri, are of an obviously fantastic nature, but in the original Persian make for good reading.

It is said that this particular saint, who migrated to Bijapur from the north, was anxious to win the King's allegiance from the *jāgi*, Ajai Pal, who endeared Ibrahim to himself by raising his daughter from the dead. In the contest which followed, the *jāgi* demonstrated his miraculous powers by elevating himself to the ceiling; the Qadiri saint did the same but flew off to Mecca, from which he promptly returned with a pinch of the holy dust. Ibrahim was impressed and again embraced Islam, at which point the unfortunate daughter died once more.

Ibrahim's style was very individual and differed greatly from that of poets to whom he extended the hand of patronage at his court. His language, a blend of local dialects, often contains words which he might well have made up himself. Comparisons are difficult to make and are usually completely invalid, but if we say that Ibrahim's verse strikes the modern Urdu ear in much the same way as Burns' fabricated Ayrshire dialect strikes that of a twentieth-century English speaker, perhaps we shall not be too far from the truth. Even without recourse to commentaries, we get the gist of the poems of both writers and feel that

sentiment always prevails over dry academic analysis.

Following the traditions of Indian poetry, feelings of love are often expressed in the words of a lady waiting the return of her lover, whose epitome was Krishna. His dalliance with his milkmaids, his long absences from home, his alluring charm have frequently impressed poets of every language and persuasion:

Dear moon, I'll tell you a story:
We are both unhappy by day
The night has come in its glory
And our cares are far away

I'll put out the lamp, for the envious
sun
Like a spy will take our news and run
Through every street and lane of the
town,
Beware lest he come to announce the
dawn!

Ibrahim, do not sleep! Wake up and rise
Your young girl is decked out so fair
Embrace her and kiss those greedy eyes
Night is short and like love so rare.¹²

Another poem, set to the *raga Malhar*, played during the rainy season, describes a beautiful, dusky southern girl. The coming of the rains offers relief from the heat of the long summer and the season is regarded as the most romantic of all.

My sweetheart and the monsoon rains
are one
For both are welcome but their visits
rare.
Her flashing smile can well outshine the
sun
Whose radiance strives to pierce the
heavy air.

¹²Nazir Ahmad, ed., *Kisb-e Mausam* (New Delhi: 1956).

And as the moonbeam fills the sky with
light
Her sulky lips give promises of night.

Her dress reflects the colors of the sky
And little does to hide her shapely form.
A welcome breeze repeats her passioned
sigh
Which like the thunder, echoes in a
storm.
The down upon her cheeks is warm and
soft
Her cries sound sweet like doves inside
their loft.

The thunder resounds like the beat of
the drum
The King calls out "it is time to come"
And Ibrahim is a slave entranced
To the sound of the rain a peacock
danced.¹³

Ibrahim's contemporary, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, who died a few years before him in 1612, ruled the eastern kingdom from his mountain city of Golkonda. This romantic figure also attracted the interest of Persian historians and many of their accounts are almost certainly fictitious. In 1600, in order to provide more room for the growing population of his capital, he founded the city of Hyderabad which has always been one of the most important centers of Urdu.

It is said that in his youth, Muhammad Quli fell in love with a Telugu speaking Hindu girl named Bhagmati who lived in the village of Chichlam on the other side of the river Musi. His frequent visits to her home obliged him to ride his horse through the gushing river and this caused his father, Ibrahim Qutb Shah, no little anxiety. A bridge was therefore constructed, known now as the Purānā Pul (the old bridge), which still carries the heavy traffic of Hyderabad.

On the site of his sweetheart's village he constructed the Ār Minār (the four minarets) and the new city which rapidly expanded around the

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 102.

building was named Bhagnagar. Later when he married Bhagmati, who then took the Muslim faith, he changed her name to Haidar Mahal, and the city founded in her honor was accordingly renamed Haidarabad.

There is probably little truth in the story, but few Hyderabad citizens have ever disputed it.

What remains of Muhammad Quli's verse consists almost entirely of Urdu *ghazal*, which show the increasing influence of Persian upon the language. His meters, which are those employed by every Urdu poet, whether in the south or the north, who came after him, are impeccably Persian, and his poems display some influence of the great Iranian masters whom he admired, especially Hafiz, some of whose *ghazal* he rendered into Urdu.

Many of Muhammad Quli's *ghazal* were composed on the theme of love, often expressed in the Indian fashion by a woman awaiting the favors of her lover, who frequently turns out to be the King himself.

My love's away; I cannot sleep this long
night through.
My handsome Lord, my only pleasure is
to sleep with you.

I lie unconscious; then I wipe my
burning, fevered brow.
My memory belies my thoughts. My
Lord, please do come now!

Hippocrates could not prescribe for me
a curing antidote.
Give me the wine of your lips. On you
alone, my Lord, I dose.

One night in love is like a hundred
nights—or so it's said.
But now I rest alone, my Lord. Please
call me to your bed.

You are king; your deeds and valiant
actions are so brave.
Relive me, if you wish. From you a kiss
is all I crave.

My God, I thank the Prophet for the
 gift that he bestowed
 Upon the King. With her sweet talk,
 she'll win all she is owed.¹⁴

In others the beloved is described in the more conventional way by the male lover. In this happy age love was rarely unrequited and Muhammad Quli's verse stands in sharp contrast to that of the later Delhi poets, like Mir Taqi Mir (c. 1722-1810), whose *ghazals*, no doubt reflecting the despondency of his age, are full of lamentation and tears of blood. One gains the impression that Muhammad Quli suffered little during his life.

Love is sweet in every way, in every
 heart,
 My sweetheart's love sustains my soul if
 we're apart.

The whole world is enchanted by her
 flashing eyes
 Her tresses raise a tumult in the
 heavenly skies.

Ascetics lost their senses when they saw
 her face.
 The breath of Jesus is imparted by her
 charm and grace.

Let men of learning tell me all I should
 not do.
 But fate decreed that I should fall in
 love with you.

My rival's jealous. How his wretched
 head bows down!
 When he beholds the jewels in my

¹⁴M.Q. Zār, ed., *Kulliyat-e Muhammad Quli Qasb Shāh* (Hyderabad, 1940), Pt. 2, p. 5.

radiant crown.

For I received this blessing from the
twelve Imams,
Who favored me and took me in their
loving arms.

The Pole Star is your rightful title,
Qutb Shah
Give thanks to God that it will always
be your star.¹⁵

An interesting feature of this work are the *ghazal* he composed to mark the various festivals, both religious and secular, which took place annually in Hyderabad, and we have a number of poems on the subject of the birthdays of the Prophet and Ali, whom as a fervent Shi'a, he passionately admired; his own birthday; the celebrations of the New Year and the rainy season; the buildings of Hyderabad; and the joys of life in general.

Muhammad Quli, for all his religious fervor, is known to have indulged, perhaps to excess, in drinking wine, which according to some accounts was the cause of his premature death. Reluctantly he abstained during Ramazân, the month of fasting, but as soon as the crescent moon was sighted in the sky heralding the end of the month's ordeal, he once more gladly took up his goblet.

The moon is on the heaven! Pour me
wine; please pour me wine!
The fasting's gone, my *sagt*; now this
goblet will be mine.

For one whole month I've fasted; I've
respected the command
Of Islam, now I seek the favor of your
gentle hand.

The flask now bends its narrow neck in
deference to me.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Pt. 1, p. 243.

I hope I am forgiven for this long
sobriety.

For thirty days, my *sāqī*, I have been
without a drink.

Come, fill the cups, my darling servant,
right up to the brink.

My God! This wine is vintage. It's so
red, so full, so nice.

I wonder if they'll serve me when I go
to Paradise!¹⁶

Muhammad Quli, whose ancestors had originated from Turkestan, and had therefore been Sunni by persuasion, became a Shi'a, and his feelings towards Ali and the family of Ali, who met their death at Karbala, are frequently expressed in his verse. Like many of the Sufi poets who preceded him, he had little time for dissenters and heretics.

Under the patronage of the rulers of Bijapur and Golkonda, whose kingdoms flourished until the 1680's, when they were finally annexed by the Mughals, many works of increasing quality were produced by writers who were attached to the respective courts. The favorite genres were the *magnat* and the *ghazal*, but other works were also produced both in verse and prose. These works have only recently attracted the attention of scholars and scores of manuscripts still lie unedited in various libraries of the world.

Over the eighty year period during which they were composed, the language went through a continuous process of refinement and standardization, but maintained its distinctive Dakani features, which can still be heard in the Urdu spoken in Hyderabad and other cities of the south.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pt. 1, p. 104.

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Re-Naming Oneself: Miraji and the Politics of Gender

MIRAJI, THE PEN-NAME of Sana'ullah Dar, is one with which not even many aficionados of modern Urdu poetry are familiar. In fact, unless one is privy to a certain type of knowledge about Urdu poetry, one can entirely misread his name. When I tell people that I'm working on Miraji, and see the initial gestures of recognition, I usually hasten to correct a possible misconception on their part and add that Miraji was a twentieth-century male Urdu poet who died in 1949 and not *Mirabai* the seventeenth-century, ubiquitous female *bhakti*. Then I tell them the story of "how Miraji got his name." He fell in love with a Bengali woman called Mira Sen, whom he never got to know, and took her name. The three names have begun forming a triad for me, attached to each other like limbs. But it is only when I use or circulate Miraji's name that the other two are called up. I would like to address in this paper the implications of this connection among the three names.

I don't often, but perhaps I should, include the information that just before his death Miraji was translating the poems of Mirabai, which he intended to get published. He had made, as he did for many of his books, his own frontispiece, which read: "Miranjali, The Songs of Mirabai (Hindi, Gujarati and Marwari) Miraji." When I read the frontispiece out loud, the names run together. The oral repetition collapses the distinction between them—Miranjali, Mirabai, Miraji.¹

Using Miraji's name, then, requires explanatory details. And one of the purposes of telling his tale is to distinguish between him, a man who

¹ I have the only copy of this frontispiece. I am very grateful to Akhtarul Iman for presenting it to me along with copies of much of Miraji's unpublished work. Much of the work on my dissertation would not have been possible without his very valuable assistance.

had adopted the name of the woman he ostensibly loved, and a woman poet, queen, *Makna*, who ostensibly lived around the seventeenth century.

So, what's in a name, an author's name in this case? What does it do? How do people read it or encounter it? What are the ramifications of the name-story that accompanies the name or follows the name around? What is the difference between the two *Mitas*? Is there a difference between the two *Miras*? Do listeners have different expectations when they use the name of both? What happens when one conflates *Mita's* name with "her real" gender and allows the other *Mira's* name to stand apart from "his real" gender? What happens to the *Mira* whose name is the nodal point of the explanatory story that accompanies *Miraji*? Therein lies a tale, but before I get to it, let me tell you the other stories that accrue around *Miraji's* name.

Miraji has been, even by his friends, constructed and then reproduced as a particular type of controversial persona. A generally known description of him, and one which animates narrative after narrative, was articulated by Sa'adat Hasan Manto (d. 1955)—a fiction writer and a self-styled friend of *Mitaji's*—in "Tin Gôle" (Three Balls): "*Miraji* was a disgusting man who exerted the kind of fascination a stinking toilet might."² This description is underscored and made normative by a litany of events that become paradigmatic in the production and maintenance of the personality named "*Mitaji*": he threw up at someone's doorstep, throwing up was a game to him called "making an omelet"; he peed regularly out of someone else's window; he scrounged money every evening to fill the bottle he always carried with him with the cheapest liquor available at the local dive.

The production of a personality in *Mitaji's* case, as an isolationist, drunk, dissolute, self-centered, pathologically sexual, morally bankrupt man, unsuccessful both in love and in his work, requires the elision and minimization of other stories that contradict this picture of *Miraji*. These other stories are then left out as unimportant or relegated to *Miraji's* historical past, or the early part of his life.³ One seldom hears the stories of his work-habits or his relationship to his work. For example, he worked assiduously every day from nine to five, if not on a job then on his poetry. His papers, which were his only property, were meticulously organized

²Manto, "Tin Gôle" in Kumār Pān, ed., *Miraji: Saṁgrah aur Fanā* (New Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 1981), pp. 31–43.

³Aijaz Ahmad, "Miraji: Saṁgrah aur Fanā," in *Sauvā* 36 (May–June 1966)

and beautifully written (he was an inveterate list-maker). He published continually in numerous journals, had five books published in the thirty-five years of his life and had five other manuscripts among his papers when he died, two of which were published posthumously. His generosity and capacity for friendship were well documented. He was generous with his money and gave it away as it came in, he was kind, and his friends knew that they mattered a great deal to him and could call on him if they needed him. And finally, one rarely hears about his careful, searching, ferocious intelligence.

As I sifted through the various biographical narratives associated with Miraji, including my own attempts to tell his story, and to explain him, I began to realize that his story was far more complex than I had envisioned. In Miraji's case I was dealing with discursive or linguistic formations, or stories in which he had been represented. The materials I had available to me were the oral and written narratives, including Miraji's letters, in which he had been created as a literary artifact. I had to cope with several competing narratives which depicted him in different contradictory ways. But the many accounts of Miraji that were not my own also pathologized Miraji's complexity or ignored it.⁴

The narratives about Miraji constructed him as an author. Miraji was written and spoken about *because* he was an author. As an author, he is someone whose name is attached to or associated with work, with writing and publishing, as well as with the oral performances of his work. But in Miraji's case, the construction of him as an author was also connected to the representation of him as a certain type of male personality, and to the fashioning of a biography for him that conformed to the personality. Miraji's biography superseded his work. His biographical narrative was imposed on his poetic oeuvre, so that his writing came to mirror his biography. In order to make the poetry conform to norms that became standard for him, the poems that did not fit these norms were read as anomalies, marginalized in his oeuvre and thus read out. Miraji's biography and his work then became templates for one another so that

⁴I also had to contend with the accounts of many biographers, like Aijaz Ahmad, who wrote his article (cited in the preceding note) when a theory of unified self was firmly entrenched, and therefore appears to view this ability of Miraji's to be read as a series of different unconventional personalities, as a case of "multiple personality disorder," in keeping with Miraji's general pathological tendencies. This process of pathologizing or ignoring certain facets of Miraji's personality carried over into discussions of his work.

they mutually reinforced each other and kept the other intact.

But Miraji was not an entirely passive object of representation. He participated in the cottage industry to produce himself. His name, which was chosen by him, is one instance of a self-reflexive attempt to reconstruct himself. As a woman's name, the name foregrounded the issue of gender, and made gender one of the important issues around which Miraji's recasting of himself took place. When Miraji took a woman's name he also established his "difference" from a tradition of Urdu poetry in which male poets often took a male "poetic" name. The difference called for a story. The "author" Miraji came to be explained by and associated with a story, and the story became integral to the name of this poet. When Miraji's work was read, it was often read in the context of the name-story.

The name-story is a story of unrequited love—Miraji's for Mira Sen—in which a male lover takes the name of a silent female beloved. The story which is situated in Miraji's Lahore days goes as follows:

When Miraji was working on his matriculation, he saw the woman he called his "nemesis."⁵ From this point in the story on, several variations of the tale describe their first encounter.

According to one version, Miraji and a friend, Salim Soz, were sitting on the Punjab University hockey field, when two Bengali women—Mira Sen and Protima Das—walked past them. Miraji fell in love with Mira Sen, stopped studying, and failed his university entrance exams. Mira Sen, meanwhile, joined the F. C. College. One of Miraji's friends, Muhammad Din Farazq [*jid*], was at the same college. Mira Sen's sitting room was adjacent to Miraji's friend's sitting room so Miraji would visit his friend to catch a glimpse of Mira Sen.⁶ Mira Sen's friends called her Miraji, so Miraji adopted that name.

In another version, Miraji saw Mira Sen at Kinniard College, where she frequently met her friends. One of Miraji's friends lived in a house that shared a wall with the college. So, Miraji and his friends would gather at the house, drink and look through a peep-hole in the wall at the girls next door. Miraji, during one of these gazing sessions, noticed Mira Sen and became infatuated with her. He began to follow her home from college, and continued to follow her till she left Lahore. Miraji managed to talk to Mira Sen just once. He went up to her just as she reached her

⁵Akhtarul Iman, in an interview with the present writer (Bombay, June 3, 1988).

⁶Sahid Ahmad Dehlvi, "Miraji" in *Kumār PNB*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26.

house, and said, "I have something to say to you." Mira Sen turned to look at him but was completely silent. She remained completely expressionless: she looked neither happy nor upset. Then she turned away from him, and without saying a word walked into her house. Miraji never tried to talk to her again.⁷

In both versions of the story, Mira Sen is an object of love who changes Miraji. In both stories, too, because she is looked at but never speaks, she is a silenced specular object of desire.⁸ He sees her, he changes, and then she disappears; what and how she feels is not a part of the narrative.⁹

Both stories, the first tentatively and the second more specifically, place Mira Sen in an enclosed feminine space, a sanctum sanctorum forbidden to Miraji as a male. In the "purdah" society or sexually segregated society of Lahore in the twenties, men's and women's spaces were often separated from each other and most men were not permitted in women's spaces. The "living room" with women in it, in the first story, would not have been accessible to Miraji. Kinriard College was—and still is—a women's college, and most men could not enter its walls. In order to see Mira Sen when she was in either of the two sanctums, Miraji had to be a voyeur, who looked at Mira Sen through a figurative or literal peep-hole.

Male sexuality was associated with voyeurism in a society where most women were "hidden" from the male gaze. In a society in which certain women were "hidden" from men, the only way that men had of establishing a sexual connection with them was through a peep-hole. "The encounter through the peep-hole" became one of the primary modes of expressing sexuality. Since most women in narratives about sexuality did not respond in kind, or reverse the peep-hole and look through it at men, they could not participate in the sexual process in the same way as men. They remained desexualized objects of male desire.

⁷In his papers are found many letters he wrote but never sent.

⁸This is a common theme treated in feminist film theory. For one discussion, see T. de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1987.

⁹Except for the description of her in Aijaz Ahmad's article on Miraji (cited in note 3, above), she is not specularized—described as a visual object with visual details. Even Ahmad describes her as the antithesis of what he obviously considers an appropriate visual object of desire—"She is dark and not even pretty. One knows this from a photograph from her F.C. College days."

A way of gendering and controlling sexuality in stories was by denying women the "rights of the peep-hole." This was a position of power given to men that could be maintained only because it was kept unidirectional. It also required along with the unidirectional gaze of men, hidden women who could not look back. If women did look back, they could potentially take away the male position of power.

In the second story, Miraji, by pursuing Mira Sen in a space they both shared in which they could look at each other, abrogated or nullified his position of sexual power. He made himself vulnerable to her "gaze." By speaking to her just before she entered her enclosed space or house, he made her look at him before she disappeared into a space where he had no access to her at all. But the only thing he said to her was that he wanted to say something, so he never actually made a more than a superficial connection with her. Although she turned to look at him, her response was a non-response, expressionless and silent. In turning away from Miraji, Mira Sen refused to participate in the game Miraji was playing with her. So although the story that we encounter as listeners or readers is Miraji's story about *his* love for her, Mira Sen, by turning away from him, denuded him at that moment in the story of his power over her. But at the same time, because she disappeared after their encounter, she became an empty space, a floating name, that Miraji could occupy or use with impunity. This is precisely what happened, because the story remained Miraji's name-story, and the only part Mira Sen came to play in it was as the silent/silenced beloved whose name was taken from her.

Miraji's name-story, and the way it fits into other narratives about him, puts gender in its place. He was a man, the story goes, who needed a silenced woman to get a woman's name. Narrative after narrative that I read or heard corroborates Miraji's role as a male, in direct repudiation of his female name. Miraji is depicted as a marginalized or unconventional *male* character. When Miraji was described by biographers, the descriptions of his life fit two different "life-styles" that are masculine "modes of social dissent."¹⁰ Both "life-styles"—that of a poet-lover and of a male ascetic—are acceptable, even canonical, rejections of the *grihasta* or male householder, a married breadwinner attached to an extended or nuclear family. Each appears in different narrative traditions. One, that of the drunken, dissolute poet-lover, suffering eternally from the pangs of unrequited love, who because of his passion ruptures the boundaries of

¹⁰See V. T. Oldenburg, "Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow," in *Feminist Studies* 16:2 (Summer 1990).

convention, comes from the universe of Urdu literary discourse. The other, the poverty-stricken, unattached itinerant ascetic, is more commonly encountered in stories associated with a Sanskrit-Hindi story tradition. The norms of both the ascetic and poet-lover's lifestyles stand in opposition to those established by and subsumed under the reinforcement of the four-fold division of life for men, the central and most crucial one being that of a *grihasta* or householder.¹¹ The ascetic and poet-lover both slip out from under the guidelines predicated for the *grihasta* by "denying the core prescriptions that create the identifications for the male—sexuality, lineage and property ownership."¹²

As I read him, and read about him, I found that I wanted to rewrite Miraji's story and reorganize his corpus to include narratives that complicated the male author, poet, lover, ascetic, pictures of him that I have been describing above. I wanted to rewrite him as a series of personalities that shifted with context and that conformed to or played a range of roles that occasionally overlapped and every so often came into conflict with each other.¹³ I have tried to do this in the first chapter of my dissertation, by describing him as a man who ranged from unconventional to conventional—insane, ascetic, drunk, sexual, to pedantic, celibate, careful, and intelligent.¹⁴ I also described him as someone who sometimes indulged in bouts of self-hatred, and sometimes cared immensely about himself and his primary interest—his creative work. I do not in the process of writing my story want to replace other representations of Miraji with my own, but would like to add another picture to the pile of photographs.

I would like to return to the story of Miraji's name with which I started this paper, and add that story, too, to the pile. I would like to add another Mira story to the other stories of "how Miraji got his name."

¹¹The four-fold division of life for men includes the student, householder, forest-dweller and renunciant. For a discussion of the history of them see the article by Romila Thapar "The householder and the renouncer," in T.N. Madan, ed., *Way of Life, King, Householder, Renouncer: Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1981), pp. 173-198.

¹²Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹³Stanley Fish discusses in great detail his own multiple role playing and the conflicts inherent in this process in his book *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 30.

¹⁴I am currently completing a dissertation on Miraji from Columbia University, which discusses his life and work. It is titled "Miraji: A Liminal Figure in Urdu Poetry."

Instead of attempting to separate Miraji and Mirabai, if I allow myself to run their names together, as Miraji does in the frontispiece of his work on her, could Miraji be thought of as a twentieth-century Mirabai? Then the name Miraji and his biography intersect with Mirabai's, and Miraji's stories are intertextual with Mirabai's. This move reminds us, as readers of a renegade poet like Miraji, of the necessity of reinserting gender as a predominant issue into the biographical accounts of him. The intersection of his story with Mirabai's makes him doubly unconventional; now instead of describing him as an unconventional man, we can argue that *he* was living as an even more unconventional woman.¹⁵

Mira's hagiography tells of a queen who for the love of her Lord, the god Krishna, repudiates her family and husband and travels around with a group of itinerant musicians. In variants of the story she either resists her family actively and behaves like a besotted *shakhs* while her husband is alive, or she leaves the fold after she is widowed, which is a less controversial choice for her to make. In either case, Mira is depicted as an ascetic who was also a poet-lover. Miraji's stories then, rather than just conforming to male paradigms for the poet-lover, could be read as a further contribution to the hagiography of the woman *shakhs*, whose name he had taken as his own.

This use of Mira's name and hagiography as a paradigm was consonant with the way both have been used to add to Mira's oeuvre. Some of the recent work on Mirabai makes it clear that for her, even more than for her male mystic-poet counterparts, her name and the hagiography that was associated with it was a cloak that could be assumed, and was assumed, by people composing as Mira. One could compose as Mira, and in doing so could adopt her name, her particular hagiography and a style of composition. Poems ostensibly by Mira would fill in lacunae in the hagiography, and transform or explain knotty stories associated with her. So Mira's corpus and hagiography molded each other over time. Mira's corpus and story, since it was not collected in the appropriate annals of *shakhs* literature and biography until the eighteenth century, two hundred years after her supposed life, was freely available to

¹⁵Miraji's prose pieces on other poets reflect his own interests. Miraji's discussions of the poets he writes about, Baudelaire and Mallarmé for example, diverge from other accounts of them and so look strange to anyone who has read them but does not know Miraji.

people who wanted to add to it.¹⁶

One important difference, however, between the use of Mira's name to expand Mira's corpus and Miraji's use of it, is that Miraji did not entirely become a female Mira. Under the rubric of the name he still retained an identity that kept, among other things, his gender. He also had another Mira to add to his name, a Mira who unlike the two poets, only existed as a character in another person's story.

I would like to close with other ramifications of adding Mirabai to the women who were "responsible" for re-naming Miraji, and thus placing him in a lineage of women poets. This act not only transforms the description of Miraji as an author, but also has profound effects on the way his poetry is read.

Readers like Aijaz Ahmad—who have read him as a male poet who merely specularizes the women in his poetry, creating women as objects completely subservient to a prurient male gaze and male desire—miss one of the important tenets that Miraji subscribed to as a poet. He wanted to write poetry in women's voices, as a woman.

There are certainly masculinized spaces in Miraji's poetry, like those described by Aijaz Ahmad, in which women function as stereotypical sexual objects. One example is an early poem "Dēvdās aur Pujārī" (The Devadasi and the Priest). The kind of reader who restricts his or her reading of Miraji to this sort of poem, however, elides poems that I will discuss below, in which masculinized and feminized spaces operate quite differently. I will provide below three quick examples of an alternative way to view feminized spaces in Miraji's poetry. In the poems "Ras kī Anōkhī Lahrēn" (Rare Waves of Passion) and "Tahrīk" (Emotion), Miraji uses a powerful female voice.

"Rare Waves of Passion" is a reverie in a female protagonist's voice. It explores female desire, including the desire to be free to desire, and rewrites and dissolves the female body in metaphoric correspondences with nature. Another poem that could be more fruitfully read as written in a feminine voice is "Emotion." The voice in "Emotion" is not specifically gendered, but its tropes and language of emotions permit it to be read alongside poems attributed to Mirabai, and it could be read as a twentieth-century free verse addition to Mira's corpus.

And finally, in yet other poems like "Āhgīnē kē us Pār kī ek Sām" (A

¹⁶For an account of Mirabai that addresses this point, see J.S. Hawley and M. Jergensmeyer, eds., *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Night on the Far Side of the Wine Glass), where Miraji has both masculine and feminine protagonists and voices, Miraji does not unknowingly succumb to the politics of gendered power in poetry. He writes from a self-reflexive awareness of the arrangement of gender in literary or poetic space. In "A Night on the Far Side of the Wine Glass," although the woman's voice is, at the end of the poem, reappropriated by the male voice, it is a powerful voice, separate from the other—masculine—voice in the poem. It is also a voice that is listened to, by both the poet Miraji and the male protagonist in the poem.

To close: In this paper I have discussed and analyzed the ways in which Miraji is represented in most biographies of him. I have also attempted to add my own series of representations to the extant ones, in order to allow him to be read in a less constraining fashion than he has been in other biographies. By reasserting and bringing to the fore the gender his name seems to imply that he possesses, I would like to expand the gendered options open to him as a poet and thus open to readers of his poetry when they read him.

The Feminine and Cultural Syncretism in Early Dakani Poetry¹

MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO the Hyderabad scholar Dr. Hafeez Qateed began an essay on the development of *rekht* in the Deccan with the following remarks:

Rekht is a *badnām* [disreputable] genre of Urdu poetry which is thought to serve specially for the expression of women's particular emotions and generic concerns in women's idioms²

Both the sparse treatment by scholars and widespread popular ignorance reflect the stigma of disrepute which has attached to *rekht*. More recently, conventional wisdom has been challenged³ and very basic questions posed, e.g., is *rekht* really a poetic genre, given that it is used to refer to any Urdu poem whose narrator is female? Is *rekht*, rather, a poetic voice? The term was coined, as far as we can tell, toward the end of the eighteenth century by the Lakhnawi⁴ poet Rangin, and until the last thirty years or so, referred always to a corpus of poetry composed in Lucknow and Delhi in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This poetry was light and racy, usually in what was called "women's language" (*'aurat ki bah*) though always composed and—as far as we know—consumed by

¹ *Dakani* literally means "of the Deccan," which is the south-central region of India. The term refers, generally, to the area covered by the modern states/provinces of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and parts of Maharashtra.

² *Majallat-e 'Uyūnīya*, Dakani Adab Number, 1964, p. 139.

³ See Carla Petievich, "The Feminine Voice in the Urdu Ghazal," in *Indian Horizons* 39:1-2 (1990): 25-41.

⁴ *Lakhnawi* means "of Lucknow," a northern city in modern India and a major cultural center of Urdu during the 18th and 19th centuries.

men; *reht* was also often salacious or even obscene, and recited by male poets in female drag.

Even the erudite among Urdu readers have supposed that there was little of real value to be learned from these poems other than the names of female dress, adornments, household furnishings, or particular idiomatic expressions of an emergent dialect—that of *parda-nalin* women.⁵ But there exists a large body of poetry from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Deccan, narrated in the feminine voice, whose tone is much different than the standard Lakhnavi *reht*. Produced in the Qutb Shahi court of Golkonda and the Adil Shahi court of Bijapur, this poetry predates northern *reht* by a good century and contrasts sharply with the former's *badnami* (disrepute), for it is taken very seriously by Dakani literary critics. This female-narrated Dakani *ghazal* is my present focus.

To understand *reht* as offering a catalogue for the modern reader of artifacts from a cloistered female culture is to grossly underestimate its historical value. While there is surely value in trying to reconstruct a *concrete* portrait of Qutb or Adil Shahi culture through material objects referred to in its texts, one might hypothesize instead an *intellectual* or *literary* portrait of early Dakani culture. Examination of Dakani poems in the feminine voice affords such an opportunity, but conventional understanding of what constitutes *reht* must be set aside in order to focus on the significance of the feminine voice.⁶

Perhaps the first significant feature of Dakani *reht* is that it exists at all, for there has not yet emerged any evidence of a female narrator in the earlier Perso-Arabic *ghazal* tradition from which the Urdu *ghazal* primarily descends. Furthermore, while this feminine 'atig (lover)⁷ is not predominant in the Dakani *ghazal*, she is certainly widespread. Nearly every major poet of old Dakani wrote some *ghazals* in the feminine voice.⁸

⁵In Urdu, *parda-nalin* refers to women who observe purdah or gender seclusion.

⁶*Reht* has yet to be defined satisfactorily, but in the case of Dakani poetry is understood to refer to *ghazal* or *le'is* (couplets) whose narrator is female. This is easily determined because Dakani *reht* employs grammatical feminine gender markers. The term as applied here presupposes nothing about the content of the poetry.

⁷Calling the narrator of these Dakani *ghazals* in the feminine voice an 'atig is deliberate and justifiable, since the only feature in which "she" differs from the 'atig-narrator of the "classical" *ghazal* is the gender-marked language in which she speaks—the relationship is essentially the same.

⁸I am indebted to the researches of Dr. Muhammad Ali Asar for my

not merely poets of lesser or ill-repute. The presence of this female *'āṣiq* is almost certainly inspired by the *virahini* of Indic poetry,⁹ and the significance of this inspiration should be neither overlooked nor underestimated. It indicates a recognition on the part of Dakani poets that the *virahini*—who provides the lyric voice of both *bhakti* poetry¹⁰ and secular Indic love literature—represents an expression fundamentally similar to that of the Perso-Arabic tradition's *'āṣiq* who suffers the throes of *firaq-e yār* (separation from the beloved).

Perhaps a further word or two of explanation would be appropriate here: the majority of extant literary texts from this period in Indian literature are read as devotional and expressive of the emotion called *bhakti*, which derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *bhaj* (to worship). This form of worship is embodied in an intense longing of the devotee for the divine. Such intense longing can easily blend into the erotic, and the quintessential example from *bhakti* poetry is the love of the cowherding woman Radha, for Krishna. *Bhakti* lyrics explore in great depth the longing and suffering of Radha as she pines for union with the divine in its manifestation as Krishna, a human cowherd. While much *bhakti* poetry is rather more erotic in tone than overtly devotional, a dual reading (religious/secular) of these texts is made possible with the formulation of Radha's persona as representative of the human soul. As the human soul, Radha loves at a symbolic, rather than a carnal or corporeal, level, and her love for Krishna is read metaphorically.

There exists a philosophical discourse for the Urdu *ghazal*, as well as for *bhakti* poetry, to rationalize the manifest eroticism and sensuality of both bodies of literature with devotional interpretations.¹¹ Paralleling

understanding of just how many Dakani poets wrote *ghazal* in the feminine voice; especially useful has been his *Dakani Ghazal ki Na'z-o-Namā* (Hyderabad: Hylis Traders, 1986).

⁹The *virahini* is a woman who dwells in separation from her beloved, in the state of *viraha*.

¹⁰*Bhakti* (mystical/devotional) poetry celebrates a passionate, even erotic, devotion to Hindu deities, and represents the dominant voice of artistic expression over most of the Indian subcontinent for approximately the millennium between 800 and 1800 CE.

¹¹With the popular deity Krishna so prominent a character in *bhakti* lyrics, this rationalization is more explicit than in the *ghazal*. Since the *ghazal* is an Islamic art form, it would never be illustrated in such a manner that human-divine union were visually depicted.

Radha's carnal/spiritual longing for Krishna is the idealized ambiguity between reading the *ʿilq*'s expressions in the *ghazal* as either *'ilq-e haqiqi* ("true" love, that of humans for the divine) or *'ilq-e majāzi* ("metaphorical" or mundane love, that of humans for one another). *Majāzi* love is legitimate insofar as loving other humans can be seen as a stage along the path toward perfecting oneself for the divine beloved. Yet the essential aesthetic in both bodies of poetry proceeds from a perception that the purest, most poignant, most profound love experienced by human beings is love in separation, touching at times upon the erotic; and the complex of emotions expressed by *bāksī* poetry's *virahini* is quite compatible with that expressed by the *ghazal*'s *ʿilq*. Both literatures are essentially about the longing and straining toward union with the beloved. While union seems more possible for Radha—indeed the promise of resolution is perhaps stronger in *bāksī* texts than in the *ghazal*¹²—it can be argued that in both *bāksī* and the *ghazal* the focus is upon longing, rather than upon union.

The recognition that Radha as a poetic persona represents the human soul in its quest for union with the divine beloved is, I would argue, at the heart of early Dakani poets' adoption of the feminine voice: they saw in her an *ʿilq*.

Some Dakani scholars have tried to address the significance of this feminine voice and to explain its origin in Hindu Sankhya philosophy.¹³ They suggest that the Muslim elite of Bijapur and Golkonda, in choosing to adopt Hindi's feminine voice, demonstrate a familiarity with Sankhya, and the concept of *ragun-vādi bāksī*¹⁴ deriving therefrom. Dr. Syeda Ja'far explains that in the Sankhya system *spirit* is equated with the male

¹²This notion is bolstered, of course, by the plethora of visual representations (primarily paintings, but also sculptures) of Radha and Krishna in union.

¹³Sankhya is one of the six primary schools of Hindu philosophy. For scholars positing a link between Sankhya and the feminine voice in early Dakani poetry, see Dr. Syeda Ja'far's critical introduction to the *Kulliyat-e Muḥammad Qutb Qayṣ Sab* (New Delhi: Taraqqi-e Urdu Bureau, 1983, pp. 208–212); and Dr. Hafeez Qaseel, *op. cit.* Both scholars appear to draw very heavily on Hindi scholar Rajeshwar Parshad Chaturvedi's *Rādhakī Kāvya* and Ram Ratan Bhatnagar's *Sur Sāhya ki Bhūmika* for their application of Sankhya philosophical precepts to interpretations of *bāksī* and, by extension, of Dakani poetry narrated in the feminine voice.

¹⁴The term *ragun-vādi bāksī* we may take to refer to that verse which expresses love for a divine beloved whose physical attributes are enumerated.

principle, while *matter* is equated with the female principle.¹⁵ The divine occupies the spiritual realm, and human beings the material world. Thus did the poet Mirabai allegedly declare that there was only one male—Krishna—while everyone and everything else is female. Both the *virahini* and 'Afiq represent passive matter, awaiting bestowal of union from the active agent. And since only God, the divine beloved, bestows such union, and Krishna embodies the divine beloved, only Krishna can represent the male principle. By this formulation, logically, the 'Afiq would indeed be feminine. Hence the explicit adoption of the feminine gender into the *ghazal*'s articulation of 'Afiq.¹⁶

Conventional wisdom assumes that the *ghazal* appeared in Urdu literature by direct way of Persian literature, and does not appear to take into account the developments achieved in Dakani, or to attach them sufficient significance. Yet adopting the feminine represents a profound innovation in the *ghazal* genre; and the Dakani culture which produced this female narrator necessarily must have achieved a high level of sophistication and enlightenment in order to effect such innovation, and deserves, therefore, to be taken far more seriously than scholars have taken it. The *ghazal* has been constructed in Urdu literary criticism of the past century as a genre already perfected by the time it appeared in vernacular language in India, and I have elsewhere explored some of the implications of such a construction.¹⁷ We need not go into them here except to

¹⁵See note 13, above.

¹⁶It has been suggested that a fundamental distinction between the *ghazal*'s 'Afiq and *Ikhti*'s *virahini* is that the former is constructed formally as active, the lover, while God is passive, the beloved (*mahabb*); whereas in *Ikhti* the roles are reversed, rendering the poet a passive beloved with God the active lover. The suggestion is provocative, but does not seem to me to take into account the complex tapestry of *Ikhti* literatures. For example, the Srivaishnavas in Tamil write of a devotee who arrives, strains, and sacrifices, in a fashion reminiscent of the *ghazal*'s 'Afiq, to prove him/herself worthy of divine grace; and while I do not argue against the 'Afiq persona as a basically active character, the point remains that in both bodies of poetry, union with the divine is *bestowed* by the divine rather than *carried out* by the human. This fundamental power dynamic is, I would maintain, what informs the literary equation at issue here between the 'Afiq and the *virahini*.

¹⁷Carla Pettievich, "Heroes, *Virahinis* and Gender-Bending in the Urdu Ghazal." In Sandra B. Freitag, ed., *Culture at Contested Site: The State and Popular Participation in the Indian Subcontinent* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). The implications need not be rehearsed here except, as in the

suggest reasons why most critics have either ignored or underestimated the feminine narrator as a significant innovation in the historical development of the genre.

Given the high degree of sophistication for which the the Dakani courts of Bijapur and Golkonda are known, there is no reason to be surprised that early Dakani poets were familiar with Hindi poetry. It was, nevertheless, an invaluable insight on their part to have recognized the profound similarities between *Shaki's virahini* and the *ghazal's 'alim*, even if those of us familiar with one or the other may recognize the parallel easily. What is remarkable in the case of these Qutb Shahi poets is, however, that they were open to a recognition that impelled them across cultural lines differentiating the Muslim rulers of the Deccan and their largely Hindu subjects. Certainly, not all ruling elites are eager to identify with, rather than differentiate themselves from, the local populace of the ruled. Too often rulers justify their domination and privilege with ideologies which allow them to compare themselves favorably with those whom they dominate.

While the emperor Akbar's court is famous for such cultural syncretism, and the genius of Mughal architecture is generally considered to lie in its blend of Persian forms with various indigenous elements, Mughal poetry in Urdu is perhaps not quite so adventurous. As Urdu became accepted as a literary language by the Mughals, the voice of *'alim* became reified as male. The reason for this convention is often explained as fidelity to the Persian *ghazal*, where, because of Persian grammar, no gender distinctions are indicated between lover and beloved.¹⁸ If that is so then we can assume that Mughal culture had chosen to differentiate itself from India in favor of Persia—even at the cost of a certain artificiality in the Urdu *ghazal's* diction. The choice is perfectly legitimate both artistically (in the sense that any creative choice in art is legitimate) and politically, but it is important to recognize and understand its implications.

One implication of this choice, I would suggest, is that the later Urdu *ghazal* is a cultural expression of a political entity threatened by instability. Its desire to emphasize Persian, over Indian, identity can be seen as a defensive gesture. It indicates a ruling elite tightening its ranks. And a familiarity with the political situation of the eighteenth- and

following argument, to suggest the political reasons for cultural segregation.

¹⁸In other words, the third-person singular in Persian does not bear the gender differentiation one finds in English or French.

nineteenth-century Mughal empire corroborates this interpretation, for there were numerous serious contenders for supreme power over northern India during this time.

One may argue that the Qutb Shahi kings of Golkonda (present-day Hyderabad) and the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, by contrast, enjoyed relative stability. This is especially true of poet-kings such as Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Ali Adil Shah II, both great patrons of the arts. Their relative wealth and stability allowed them to expand more into their physical environment than the later Mughals; they did not require the greater abstraction of the later Urdu *ghazal*.¹⁹ In this context, let us return to Dakani poetry in the feminine voice.

Dr. Hafeez Qateel argues that *shair* developed in stages, beginning with the *istifzāna* (mystical), proceeding to the *ʿāshiqāna* (romantic) and thence to the *naqiʿa-gōʿ* (realistic) stage.²⁰ In the earliest stage, consistent with the mystical (and Sāṅkhya) perception that all *ʿāfiq* represent the feminine, the *ghazal*'s familiar mystical ethos is maintained. The only remarkable characteristic of *shair*, argues Dr. Qateel, is that verb conjugations, names, and physical attributes are rendered in the feminine.²¹ It is only later that a particular female language (*nirvānt zabān*), or particularly female (*zanān*) thoughts or emotions—as distinct from male or "regular" thoughts or emotions—began to appear in *shair*. One can see how this argument follows logically from the equation between concrete matter and the female principle: if the feminine represents matter and is specific or concrete, then the presence of the feminine represents equivalence with *naqiʿa-gōʿ*, or speaking of physical reality.²²

¹⁹Consider, for example, the historical coincidence of the Mughal emperor's physical confinement within the walls of the Red Fort in Delhi during the period of the nineteenth-century *ghazal*'s great refinement into abstraction. It would be interesting to consider also the parallels between great political contestation in the seventeenth century and the abstract Indo-Persian poetry of *Shāh-e Hindī*, though that is beyond the purview of the present essay.

²⁰Obviously, this formulation is quite consistent with our general understanding of the overall progression of Urdu literature. Sufis, Mughal courtiers, and Progressive writers of the mid-twentieth century would provide a broad spectrum of development along these lines.

²¹Of course, this significance is enormous, as I argue in my "Heroes, Virabhis and Gender-Bending in the Urdu Ghazal" (see note 17, above).

²²In that same logical universe, the *istifzāna* would parallel the divine and the *ʿāshiqāna* the masculine, thus maintaining a hierarchy in which divine stands higher than masculine and masculine higher than feminine.

Even while acknowledging Dr. Qateel's argument as quite plausible, one could still take some exception to it. I would like to speculate in a slightly different direction, based on a few *le'ri* of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1566–1611) and Ghavasi (seventeenth century), two reasonably contemporary poets.

Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah:²³

sunē dh dē bāt jāhib hamārī
saheliyān dāur main bāt bandī tumārī
 Listen, my lord, to a thing or two:
 My girlfriends are jealous, 'cos
 I'm the one who's yours.

saheliyān mēn lārjān sūn akar k'arī bāt
munj dēkh kar b'arh mēn na-gāh' bāt
 I've come and stood before you
 on a dare from my girlfriends—
 Don't look at me and knit your brow!

sunē mērī sāt piyā baurān rāt
ke par-stj par sāt'ā parsang gamāt
 Listen, friend, my lover makes love
 elsewhere—
 My lord disports himself
 on another(s) bed.

Ghavasi:

sahelī nā jalī j'ūn tyūn juhā hū'ī sūr bābar
āpē
jālūt munj birahnt k'ūn nihāl j'ūn garm
āngār āpē
 Friend, dawn broke and the sun came
 out
 just like a hot ember to burn this poor

²³The three verses here are taken from three different *ghazab* (see Syeda Ja'far, *Kulliyān*, pp. 706, 707, and 692, respectively).

srubini 24

isnē mēn dil kō d'ānq²⁴ na pā'i kin kīf
pāz²⁵ān
ke lārā munj nahīn dīnā nīpat d'āndkār
āyā
 I've searched my breast, but whom can
 I ask
 to help me find my heart?
 I find no remedy in sight
 no matter how deeply I plumb the
 darkness.

Sayeda Ja'far has called Muhammad Quli's poetry "the first in which lines of *rext* appeared in Dakani."²⁵ According to Dr. Qareel's formulation these lines should then express an abstract mysticism; yet there is concreteness of lived, physical experience in these three verses (which Dakani experts cite as representative of Muhammad Quli's *rext*) that contrasts rather dramatically with the two *le'rs* by Ghavasi above. His couple of *rext* verses strike the reader as more "romantic" (*'alīqāna*) than "realistic" (*sāqī'a-gō*), and the imagery is more abstract by far than most of Muhammad Quli's *ghazal* poetry. One might even go so far as to say that they are reminiscent of the later Urdu *ghazal* associated with northern India in the nineteenth century, where the feature of abstraction was so developed as to have been called "artificial" by nearly every critic of stature in Urdu literature.²⁶ But both *le'rs* just presented date from the

²⁴An alternative translation:

Friend, I survived the night
 to see the morning sun emerge:
 It acted as a spark,
 rekindling separation's fire.

²⁵See her *Kulliyāt-e Muhammad Qulī Qayūm Shāh* (New Delhi: Taraqqī-e Urdu Bureau, 1985), p. 108.

²⁶See such historical surveys as those by Muhammad Husain Azad, *Āb-e Hayāt* (Allahabad: Rām Narāyan Lal Bēnī Mād'hav, 1880), or Aḡf Husein Ḥālī, *Muqaddima-e Se'r-e Shā'ir* (Aligarh: Maktaba Jamī'a Ltd., 1893); or by Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), Annemarie Schimmel, *A History of Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbal* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1976), Ahmed Ali, *The Golden Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), and others.

late sixteenth or very early seventeenth century, and are fairly contemporaneous.

It would be equally plausible to argue, in contrast to Dr. Qaseel, that the central theme of love in separation in the Urdu *ghazal* developed in its treatment, over time, from more concrete to a more abstract expression. In Qutb Shah's *ghazal* in the feminine, the basic theme treated almost exclusively is *siraha*, as characterized in Radha-Krishna *bhakti* poetry. The narrator is a woman who has tasted, at a previous time, the joy of union (*mil-gati* or *mil-e yār*) but whose lover has since left her. A secondary scenario is that of a woman longing for a beloved in closer proximity but not actually present, as in the first example of Muhammad Quli's verse ("Listen, friend, my lover makes love elsewhere . . ."). Her suffering is acute and specific, whereas the *ʿāliq* in more abstract *ghazal* poetry longs for a union which has never been, which arguably cannot come to pass during his lifetime,²⁷ and which, therefore, can hardly be conceived of. Human experience supplies him no concrete images to match the empty bed evoked in that first *le'r* by Muhammad Quli. Rather, he has moved beyond bedrooms and their furnishings. Now the cosmos itself has come to serve as the backdrop against which he experiences separation, a scenario so vast that even the sun is only a glowing ember.

However, if there is a "truth" to be found here, it might lie in yet another direction, viz., one in which we allow for a complex present in every era of Urdu poetry. Those poets who have maintained great repute over the centuries have necessarily demonstrated great versatility, an ability to compose in a variety of situations and moods, to be both contemplative and glib, plaintive and sassy. Witness, for example, another *ghazal* by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, also in the feminine voice, in which the mood is very different from that of the few *le'r*s above:

sakti bāitāḥ lakar karti valē mīḥā'ī ast nā
divānī nīlhar mēh kō'ī hadbāḥ nābāt bāst
nā

My girlfriend speaks sugary words

²⁷This point of view can be gleaned from Ḥalīb's famous

ye na pī hamārī qīsmat ke mīḥā'ī yār hōz
agar aur jīst rahet yehi insāḥār hōz

where, had the *ʿāliq* gone on living, he would have necessarily remained waiting, since the beloved here is understood as Divine, and union with the Divine beloved can only come about after death.

but it doesn't result in sweetness:
O mad one, don't look for rock candy
in sugarcane!²⁸

xabar hā' ī lah hā' ī asarā yakā-yak ā' ī muj
ḥārā
na pūḥ' juk p'irā ḥārā sū ab bīrā uhdā ī
nā
Word has it that the king came gal-
loping up to my door,
then left without even asking after my
health—
how can such pangs of separation be
borne?

kabūn apan bīrah jū kan agin f'ula p'ir n
tan
sū mukil dā'ya muj man haman duk' hā' ī
sund ī nā
Were I to even speak to another
of separation's burning tumult
its flames would scorch their body
so I keep it locked safe in my heart.

magar h'ā'īl xudā at duk' dik'ā'īl n suraj
hā muk'
and'ā'īl nān pā'īl sū sū muj' par duk'
dahā ī nā
But let God lose me this sorrow
and show me the face of that sun:
if solace could come to these darkened
eyes

²⁸In other words, "Don't expect your companion, with her rudimentary understanding of love, to articulate the crystallized essence of love that your own experience has distilled." While it is the role of the *saki* (the female companion of the woman in love) to cajole and humor the heroine-narrator as she suffers the pangs of separation, the isolation she feels from others who do not share her plight cannot be bridged—the companion's words stem from her own callow experience, and are incapable of touching the narrator.

sorrow would burn me no more.

Whether our personal preference is inclined more toward abstract, elegant poetry such as the couple of Ghavasi's *de's* above, or more toward the pungency or piquancy of the first examples of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, both poets have expressed familiar human emotions in these verses in the feminine voice. Such sparks of recognition measure success in the realm of Urdu *ghazal*, and its field is wide enough to contain both.

In only three out of nine verses discussed here is it even reasonable to consider the emotions expressed as "particular to women," or the concerns only "female." However, if it was the voice of *Daku's virahini* that inspired these explorations of the theme of love in separation that became so crucial to the later *ghazal*, then let us remember that we are indebted to the climate of cultural tolerance achieved by the Qutb Shahi rulers for the enrichment supplied the Urdu *ghazal* tradition when Dakani poets adopted the feminine voice and the "female principle."

An Evening of Caged Beasts

[Asif Farrukhi and Frances W. Pritchett are currently putting together an anthology of postmodern Urdu poets translated into English, entitled An Evening of Caged Beasts. The following is a selection from their work in progress. —Eds.]

Afzal Ahmad Sayyid

URGENT MEMORANDUM

Miss Yasmin Sultana,
in view of the above
you are informed that
you have become
redundant.

From 1981 to 1983,
your chemistry was no longer
so colorful.

To perform twofold duties,
an efficient full-timer is needed.

Yours sincerely, the undersigned, feel
that your speed
compared greater
or lesser.

The monies due you (if any)
will be forwarded to

[...]

your address (if any).

Your services are no longer required,
Miss Yasmin Sultana.
Now the one-act play ends
and the Company Act begins.
So long.

THE VERDICT

The radiologist is reading
some x-rays
stamped with the date
of my last poem.
Those people's wounds

are being read with so much
delay, so much
cruelty—those people
who are still busy undergoing
the test
of living

"A man dies of his own mistake."
This is the Surgeon-General's verdict.

"You have made a mistake."
In the evening when I tell her
that I love her very much
this is what she'll say,

STEP INTO MY PARLOR

Step into my parlor,
Death says to me

In her body I see
all my beloveds

[...]

naked

Trickling down her thigh
 I recognize my semen
 She is pregnant with the poem
 I could not write,
 She is pregnant with a net
 in which I wanted to catch
 a star

Step into my parlor,
 Death says to me,
 and she does not know
 that now I have
 nothing
 to give her

THE HOSTESS

You're a good hostess

You bring me an apple
 marked by your teeth

and a bloody pomegranate

and a poem

and a knife
 that cuts things
 crooked

—Translated by Asif Farrukhi & Frances W. Pritchett

Tanvir Anjum

NOT A SOUND

Dust has spread through our homes
 there's no rain in this season
 we let the last bit of torn cloud pass
 away

now

like my disobedient son
 it won't come back

Hatred has spread through our hearts
 there's no miracle in the night
 we let the water run into the mud
 now

like an old man's lost vision
 it won't come back

Death has spread through our bodies
 there's no sound in these lanes
 we let blood run in the streets
 now

like my lost god
 it won't come back.

CROSSROADS

A beautiful poem
 or a day's content

A hungry day
 or a sleeping night

A long journey
 or a long car

A cold ground
 or a high house

An ugly war
 or a beautiful girl [...]

A difficult book
 or a simple child
 A speaking silence
 or a mute noise
 A crazy dream
 or a small life

NETS OF LIFE

If you're still with me today,
 so what?
 Dreams move fast
 and we are very few.
 Your smiles won't be able
 to keep up with the dreams,
 and those seasons we never found—
 we won't find them today either.

Pray, for the time for prayer is still with
 us—
 that night, trees, perfumes, colors
 stop—
 that I flow in a stream of tears,
 that you come alive
 outside of dreams.

—*Translated by Frances W. Pritchett & Asif Farrukhi*

Sarvat Hussain

IF SOME NIGHT

If some night
 this sea
 puts its foot down
 on our
 [...]

city

then lumber, warehouses, lanes
courthouses and sundials
all this scenery
made of
tributes and treaties

will collapse
on our
bodies

—*Translated by Frances W. Pritchett & Asif Farrukhi*

Zishan Sahil

THE STAIRCASE—A COMMONPLACE DIALOGUE

Don't tell me
the sun is blazing—
when I go up the stairs
my feet will burn
and I won't be able to go
anywhere.

I will now go up the stairs
and get the flowers
left in the sun
and bring them down
and put them in water.

Don't tell me
blazing sun, stairs,
flowers blooming in the water—

we can see nothing.

LOVE

For girls,
 being in love
 is as hard
 as crossing a mountain stream
 on a tree-trunk,
 or drying out
 a wet page.

But with a little care
 all these things can be done.

Girls don't even write
 anyone's name
 in their notebook.

No one who knows
 someone's name
 can possibly keep from
 writing it down.

I too know
 a girl's name.

WHITE CARPET

The carpet shop
 has a white carpet
 and everyone wants to buy it
 and everyone's obsessed with fear—

it will get dirty
 faster than other carpets
 the first dropped cigarette
 will scar it
 muddy feet
 will mark it
 pet cats

[...]

will claw it
 hot cups of tea
 will scald it

Its beauty pleases no one
 and everyone wants
 to have its color changed
 or to see it left forever
 in the shop
 with no one to buy it
 or to have the carpet shop
 catch fire some night

and the white carpet be
 burned.

THE PRISONER'S TELESCOPE

A soldier from the firing squad
 picked up from the possessions
 of the executed prisoner
 a telescope
 but then he too, like the prisoner
 was put to death,
 and the telescope came to me.

Now I can see very far—
 the roofs of railroad cars
 the happy and anxious
 faces of travelers
 the trees and signal poles
 lining the track
 and lots of birds.
 Perhaps they are saying something
 or singing
 and perhaps some children
 are watching the train with wonder
 as always.
 I can see

[...]

first morning, then evening, then stars
and sometimes clouds
in your eyes and
(when you're not here)
in your heart.

And all the things that I can't see—
glittering scythes in the fields
smoke rising from homes.

And then one morning,
gathering in the prison courtyard
the new soldiers
of the firing squad—
the sound of a bell,
and the prisoner's telescope
will go today
to someone else.

A LIFELESS POEM

This is a lifeless poem,
it will do you no harm,
it won't even get in your way.
Perhaps you might not even
see it again.

Anyone can give it a kick
and hurl it into the air,
or take it up in his hand
and knock it against the ceiling.

Under the sky or against the wall,
when it is rolling here and there
you can laugh at it
to your heart's content,
you can laugh until
tears come to your eyes.

[...]

A lifeless poem can't even cry.

You are luckier,
you have a life.
You can do anything—
even take the life
of a lifeless poem.

THE WHISTLE

Our Ravi
is still very small,
somewhat smaller than
the hedge in front of the house,
the sky is very attractive
to Ravi.

He says:
Someday I will touch it
with my hands.
For the present, he has
bought a whistle
and sometimes blows it loudly.

And he says: The sky
should be told
that I am coming
to touch it.

THE GENERAL'S NOSE

The General Sahib
early every morning
bathes in cold water
and begins to get ready.
Putting on his uniform,
he goes straight to the garden.
He is very fond

{...}

of fresh air and blooming flowers.

That day goes very badly,
when sixteen soldiers,
four sergeants, and two captains,
hear the verdict of the
court martial,
and the gardener's life
is not spared either.

That day the General Sahib
crushes a bud under his boot
saying, It has no scent.

We later realize
that for some time
the General Sahib's nose
has been blocked.

BULLDOZER

Hide that sound coming
from the bell
of your father's bicycle,
and don't look at that wall
behind which
he was buried.
Forget the blade of grass
sprouting in the mud
by his grave.
And forget every poem
written in the rain
and every song
sung again and again
by lovers.
Don't walk for very long
in the dark.
Sit on the doorstep and
write a letter to your friends,

[...]

and notice for everyone else:
 The soldier has put on his boots,
 now he will pass over our hearts
 like a bulldozer.

FOUR WALLS

Where we live
 you can call it a home—
 above a very high room
 a very low ceiling,
 a very large window
 and a very small door.

You can pass through this door
 with your arms drawn in to your chest
 without lifting your feet from the
 ground.

You can look out this window
 in a very high room
 beneath a very low ceiling.

If you wish
 without stretching out your legs, you
 can sleep
 without lifting your head, you can live.

—*Translated by Frances W. Pritchett & Asif Farrukhi*

Sa'iduddin

POEM

Make less noise
 speak softly

[...]

so that your voice
 can at least reach
 the ones
 who want
 to hear you

GLOVES

I scream
 all my life
 I have never touched
 anything

not a voice
 not a wall
 not your body

my whole life
 I haven't been able
 to take off
 the gloves
 from my hands

A MISTAKE

A smallish matter
 concerning flowers
 caused his death
 (so they say)
 but I believe
 he was killed.
 He was killed by the radioactivity
 of words,
 when suddenly
 (as can happen anywhere)
 he couldn't get a grip on words
 and they got a grip on him

Sara Shaguftah

THE SKIES OWE ME MY MOON

Our tears were made into eyes
we played tug-of-war with our storms
and became our own mourning

When the stars call out
the earth hears more than the sky
I loosened the hair of Death
and stretched out on a lie

Sleep played marbles
with my eyes
The evening endured
two-faced colors
The skies owe me my moon

I am a lamp in Death's hand
On the wheel of births
I see Death's chariot
My human being is buried
in the earths

Lift up your head from
humble prostrations
Death has left
a child
in my lap.

A DEBT

My father was naked
I took off my clothes
and gave them to him
The earth too was naked
I branded it
with my house
Shame too was naked

[...]

I gave it eyes
 To thirst I gave a sense of touch
 And in the flower-beds of lips
 I sowed the one who goes away

The seasons were wandeting, carrying
 the moon
 I banded the seasons
 and set the moon free

From the smoke of a funetal pyre
 I made a human
 and opened my mind before him—
 his word which he chose at birth—
 and he said
 I see a wonder in your womb.

When the fite moved away from my
 body
 I heated up my sins

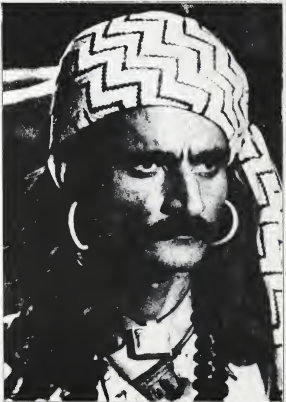
Even after I was a mother
 I became a virgin
 and my mother too became a virgin,
 now you are the wonder of a virgin
 mother

I'll burn all the seasons on a funetal
 pyre
 I blew a soul into you
 I snap my fingers
 in the thythin of your seasons

What will dust think?
 Dust will think shadows
 and we will think dust—
 your denial gives life to me.

Shall we suffer the trees' cutse
 or wear the rags of sorrows?

—Translated by Frances W. Pritchett & Asif Farrukhi



Murphy

MIRAJI

AN EVENING ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE WINE GLASS

"This isn't a goblet." I pick up a glass
sliver,
Pick it up and toss it into clear pond
water
to make some ripples.
Whose hand lifted the veil of day and
night?
So that the dancer, pirouetting on her
glittering leg
unveiled a glimpse of a signpost,
seduced, drew my glance to her.

Bring it here.
Let the *swan-goblet* swim on.
Bring it here.
I'll drink every drag of thirsty thought.

Why should forgetfulness clutch my
skirt? Isn't she the
whore whose shawl traps thousands
of heaving breaths
that foolishly ripple and dissolve?

My dried, half-dead wrist holds
spilling space,
in my every vein, blood drops shiver—
sweat on the dancer's forehead.

Whose soft hennaed finger stroked the
blue lotus
so that every petal shivered? [...]

I fear my atrophied loneliness may now
dissolve.

Get up, come to me . . . come to me . . .
why're you so unsure?

What were you drinking to? Why did
you boast:

I have to drink the blood of my past
life.

Go away, bring the sleeping dancer,
who with her cold eyes,
with a single pat, puts my bounding
heart
to sleep in warm sighs.

I must live. I will crush this moment
with a snap of my fingers and make
it
a witness and confidant of endless
time.

Bring it here.

Let the swan-goblet swim to me,

Let the scene rise up again that once
stood in front of me
and suggested to me:

"Your every breath is death-bound."

Your bright flowering face has made my
dust-heap blossom,
it shook me up, as a gust of wind
sweeps a dried petal along,
never stopping
flows along, flows along, sweeps along.

Have you ever seen the sparks in a
fireplace?

Laughingly stroking your cheek,
painted red
every finger

[...]

oozes blood.

A thin sliver of a delicate succulent fruit
 touches
 my tongue, look—
 the simple whiteness of a plain robe
 crushes dry leaves.

Stay wrapped around me.
 Let me imagine that a sip of your arms
 will make my heart giddy,
 or shall I
 in profound emptiness
 black darkness
 rocking and rocking again,
 close my wet eyes?

This morning-robe betrays the secret:
 Don't think, silence is better.
 But a wave splattered with foam comes
 flooding
 across my thoughts.

Bring it here.
 Every twisting movement of the swan's
 warm throat makes
 the billows in the dancer's skirt
 swing,
 who until now
 sat hidden at my side.

But
 why do you regard me like a foolish
 child?
 I am not a foolish child,
 nor are you a foolish child—

I understand!
 Whenever the swan-goblet keeps time
 with the gurgling wine flask, [...]

the smooth surface of the wine
 bubbles,
 and each bubble is a foolish child—
 each touches the dancer's skirt
 calls out to the past night,
 and dissolves.

I said
 I've always said
 I alone will clutch the dancer's skirt.

And each bubble will cry like a foolish
 child,
 each is a secret,
 that I alone can unravel.
 Casually forgetful,
 each says again and again
 bring it here.
 But nobody listens.
 Let the glass swan swim on.

Tired, the dancer returns to my
 embrace,
 and I too feel that I might go to sleep.

Take your white dress off,
 don't stay wrapped up
 my dried petal
 Plucking you like this
 I will turn you into a garden, so that

every flower cluster will suddenly
 glitter.
 Let the glass swan swim on.
 Let the swan swim to me.
 I am not blind. Yes
 Let the swan go on swimming.

ZISHAN SAHIL

BOOKWORMS

They do not
take long to go
from one poem to the next.

The river—
if it be written over somewhere
and there be no bridge thereafter—but
no one can stop them.

Pacing,
they get to the last leaf
falling
with the names of evergreen flowers.

If the writer of our poems
in some story
meets his beloved
the last time,
or sees her in some play
for the first time,
it does not take them long
to chew up the curtain,
finish off the love.

—*Translated by Alamgir Hashmi*

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Echoes and Exuberances: Baidar Bakht's Recent Translations of Urdu Poetry

THE MOST PROLIFIC, and possibly the most gifted, translator of Urdu poetry into English these days is, no doubt, Baidar Bakht of Toronto, a specialist not in Urdu literature as one might expect, but rather in bridge engineering, a subject in which he holds a University of London D.Sc. One first noted his considerable talents as a translator in *An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1984) which he edited in collaboration with the Canadian poet Kathleen Grant Jaeger. Here, all tendencies show Bakht and Jaeger to be deft and sensitive translators of the many "exuberances" of Urdu poetry into English.¹

One cannot help but compare this anthology to Mahmood Jamal's *The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1986) which features one hundred poems by seventeen poets. As would be expected, there is some overlap of poets and poems in each volume. Both anthologies have individual merits and defects: (1) Jamal's volume presents breadth, Bakht's depth; (2) Jamal, an English-language poet working alone, has produced translations whose surface textures

¹The term "exuberance" (an artistic feature found in the original text and/or maintained in the translation) and its opposite, "deficiency" (the lack of a given artistic feature in the original and/or in the translation), are based on notions of José Ortega y Gasset developed in his 1934 essay "The Misery and Splendor of Translation," for which see, *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Reiner Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 93-112. Professor A.L. Becker's lucid discussions of these concepts during the NEH institute, "Modern Southeast Asian Literature in Translation," which took place at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in the summer of 1992, were extremely helpful in understanding these ideas.

strike one as being less varied than those found in the collaborative effort of Bakht and Jaeger;² (3) the availability of the Urdu original opposite the translation allows for both playful and serious comparisons of the two, and is a highly desirable feature of the Bakht-Jaeger anthology; and (4) the extensive distribution and ready availability of Penguin books generally, and Jamal's anthology in particular, will bring tens of thousands of English-language readers to Urdu literature for the first time.

Baidar Bakht and his associates have since this anthology produced five volumes of translated poems by individual poets, and in what follows I shall review and discuss them individually, roughly according to their date of publication.³

1. Balraj Komal was born in 1918 in Sialkot, Punjab, and teaches English at Delhi University. The author of eight volumes of poetry in Urdu and Hindi, as well as a volume of Urdu short stories and a volume of criticism in Urdu, he has received numerous awards, including those given by the Uttar Pradesh Academy, the Mir Academy (Lucknow), the Ministry of Education (Government of India), and the Delhi Urdu Academy. Komal also won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Urdu prize in 1985 for his collection *Parindā Bāad Aamān* (Sky Full of Birds).

²I have suggested elsewhere that Jamal's renderings of Faiz bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Victor Kiernan in *Poems of Faiz* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971). See my "The Language of Faiz and His English Translators," *South Asia* (Australia), 14:2 (December 1992), which discusses five different translators' renderings of Faiz's poems.

³They are: (1) Balraj Komal, *Selected Poems of Balraj Komal*, edited by Baidar Bakht; introduction by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi; translated by Leslie Lavigne and Baidar Bakht (Delhi: Educational Publishing House; Toronto: Urdu Publications, 1989; 113 pp.; Rs. 40/-; US \$7.00; bilingual texts); (2) Shahryar, *The Gateway to Dreams is Closed*, translated by Baidar Bakht and Leslie Lavigne (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990; 120 pp.; Rs. 25/-); (3) Akhtar-ul-Iman, *Taking Stock: Selected Poems of Akhtar-ul-Iman*, foreword by the poet; edited by Baidar Bakht; translated by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Kathleen Grant Jaeger (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991; 146 pp.; Rs. 90/-); (4) Amjad Islam Amjad, *In the Last Days of Autumn: Selection of Poems of Amjad Islam Amjad*, selected by Baidar Bakht; translated by Baidar Bakht and Leslie Lavigne (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991; 66 pp.; Rs. 90/-); and (5) Kishwar Nazheed, *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice: Selection of Poems of Kishwar Nazheed*, selected by Baidar Bakht; translated by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Derek M. Cohen (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991; 166 pp.; Rs. 90/-).

In his introduction to *Selected Poems of Balraj Komal*, which contains thirty-three translations drawn from Komal's various collections, critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi notes that *Balraj* is the poet's single given name, and *Komal*, meaning "gentle" or "tender," his pen name. Komal's poetry, continues Faruqi, is "gentle, often understated, often complex and ambiguous. Sometimes puzzled and questioning, sometimes sad and lonely and occasionally rapturous, especially when he contemplates the antics of little children" (p. 1).

Many of Komal's poems feature children as personae, depict the "innocent" world of children, or use children's seemingly unaffected words as both perspicacious and perspicuous commentaries on the human condition. According to Faruqi, Komal has "an awareness of children and has a creative identification with them" (p. 2), much like Yeats.

In this context Komal's poem "The Paper Boat" (pp. 12-13) is notable. Here the small son of the speaker, also a poet, asks his father the same litany of answerless questions with which every parent is afflicted by a child wishing to avoid going to bed: "Why is the moon so far away?" etc. Finally, the child falls asleep and the speaker writes a poem. The next morning children are happily shouting, sailing "the fleet of tiny, wobbly ships" "in the lake of last night's rain." His son's boat is made of "The elusive form of the poem, / Familiar piece of paper, / Familiar words." If that isn't enough, the child calls out, perhaps to add insult to injury, perhaps to put everything, including the ruined poem, into proper perspective: "Anyone who doesn't clap his hands today / Is nothing but a fool."

Whereas most of Komal's poems about children are gentle and tender, several of them also contain images of extreme violence. One such poem entitled "A Girl Alone" (pp. 8-9), written in 1948, brought Komal immediate literary attention. Being the period of the post-Partition riots, it is not surprising that the poem deals with a young girl victimized by these events. She addresses a "stranger" and tells him that she has no one left in the world and

That small home under whose shade
I listened to the melody of lullabies,
Picked flowers,
Sang songs,
Smiled:
Today, it is not there.
Today, it is not there.

She asks the stranger to "Stop for a moment" and to "Listen to this tear-soaked tale . . .," to "Take along this wailing made flesh." In hopes of retrieving some tenuous connection with the world gone mad, she entreats him to be her mamma, papa, elder sister, tiny innocent brother, the proud rays of her chastity; and in a final, desperate *cri de cœur*, she begs: "Be anyone of mine, / Anyone." The economy of the last two lines in English is simply stunning.

A poem which combines both a child's profound comment and the theme of violence is "The Long Dark Lake" (pp. 40):

In that familiar town,
Boys,
Kids from school
Were passing by noisily.
A pious, innocent girl
Was killed by her own hands
In her own home.
In the crowd of the streets,
I was there too, with my mother
And other home folks.
The little one wanted me to repeat:
A star shot from the sky
Last night
And went down
Into the long dark lake.

The innocent child, "nann³2," translated here as "The little one," who wants the speaker to repeat lines from what seems to be a folk song, is the speaker's little son or, possibly (but not probably), his daughter. The choice of the gender-ambiguous and sex-neutral "The little one" is one of the many exuberances of the poem and allows for several readings, one of which is that a little girl is commenting on the death of another girl. Such a reading, with its (intended or accidental) implications of sisterhood and solidarity, exhibits more irony than if the comment were made by a male child.

The violence in this poem is the suicide of a girl who, because of the references to her as "pious" and "innocent," is perhaps a new bride. The star, "broken" from the sky, is a kind of "postshadowing" or mirroring of the suicide found earlier in the verse. More important, however, is the "long dark lake" where the star lands, from which the

poem takes its title. Is it the oblivion of death? Is it a kind of hell for suicides? Or is it simply an illusion of a star observed by a child seeming to fall into a spooky, black lake? Or something else entirely? Clearly, the ambiguity of the questions and their interpretations contribute to the complexity and quality of this poem.

A distinctive feature of Komal's poetry is his use of colors, for example, the "yellow haze" in the poem "You're Stranger" (pp. 30-31). Yellow, and its variants in the forms of golds and reds, seem to be a favorite: not always associated with good things, and often with the disappointment that comes from overreaching, achieving, and in the process losing something else more precious. "Saba's Hands Are Now Yellow" (pp. 35-36) is noteworthy in this context. In this poignant, wistful poem a young girl, Saba, paints her hands as part of her wedding ceremony; after a time, when the bride's yellow wears off, she lives as a wife, possibly in seclusion, having given up much that had sustained her as a young girl. She has gone from youth to adulthood; she's grown up and married, and has paid a price: "Saba does open her mouth and smile / But Saba no longer speaks to anyone / In whispers." Wisely, the translators have given two footnotes to this poem, pointing out the pun on the word *Saba* as both a proper Muslim female name and its meaning as "wind," thereby allowing variant readings of the text. They also explain the Indian custom of women painting their hands yellow prior to their wedding.

2. Shahryar, pen name of Akhlaq Mohammed Khan, was born in Aunolla, U.P. in 1936. Holding an M.A. and Ph.D. in Urdu from Aligarh Muslim University, he is currently affiliated with the G.N. Dev University Library, Amritsar. His collection *Kisb ka Dar Band Hai*, originally published in 1985, received the 1987 Sahitya Akademi Prize for Urdu. Here translated for the Sahitya Akademi as *The Gateway to Dreams Is Closed*, this volume contains seventy *ghazals*, a genre in which the poet particularly excels, and fifty-one *nazms*. Many of the shorter *nazms*, such as "In Favour of Staying Awake at Night" (p. 86), "Night, O Night" (p. 88), and "Enemy World" (p. 89) have a *ghazal*-like quality to them, not only in terms of their theme but also of their length.

In the *ghazal*, Shahryar sets up a dichotomy between the world of his dreams and the reality in which he lives. This juxtaposition, in which the reader is asked to compare the world of dreams to that of reality, forms a major element of the poetry, where images of the dream, dreaming, and a dream-like world abound. Shahryar is among the best

living writers of *ghazal* in Urdu. Like all good *ghazals*, his have an ethereal quality, elusive and ambiguous, yet replete with rich associations and overtones, especially with imagery or phraseology drawn from earlier *ghazal* poets which are reworked in startling new ways to make a thoroughly "modern" poem.

A number of his *nazms* are poems of premonition and warning, especially if read in light of contemporary political, social, and economic conditions in India. Foremost among these is "Poking Fun at Sadness" (p. 114), which is suffused with a crushing sense of irony as it seems to prophesy the fate of Islam and its traditions, or Muslims and their culture, or perhaps even the Urdu language itself, in India:

After receiving toll from the seas
And crossing dreadful deserts,
The army of Husain, son of Ali,
Is coming;
In fact, it's already here.
All the trees sway in ecstasy;
Angels are busy offering their respects;
Lamps are lit everywhere.
Tell us, why are you sad now?
What tragedy has befallen you?
Why do you still wear
A black band on your arm?

Two poems are dedicated to fellow Urdu writers: a touching lament consisting of four short poems entitled "In Memory of Khalilur Rahman Azmi" (pp. 76-77), in which the poet pays his respects to and shows deep appreciation for his mentor and colleague. The poem "Saughandi" (p. 115), dedicated to Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1913-1955), takes its title from the name of the prostitute heroine of Manto's famous story "Harak" (The Insult). Rejected by a would-be client who insults her, Saughandi, in a proto-women's lib epiphany which even the staunchest contemporary feminist would praise, turns on her pimp, throws him out of her room, and falls asleep curled up with her mangy dog. Shahryar's poem suggests that the exploitation and injustice toward the world's downtrodden depicted in the story continue unabated.

The next three volumes of poems seem to make up a series; their basic layout and design are uniform, as is the color of their dust jackets: a

deep, vibrant green. And it is notable too that, finally, the translators have added a few notes to help elucidate refined and important features of several of the poems.

3. Akhtar-ul-Iman was born in the village of Qila, Najibabad, U.P. in 1915. One of the major living poets of Urdu, he has written eight collections of poetry, of which *Yadān* (Memories; 1961) received the Sahitya Akademi prize in 1962. The phrase "taking stock" in the title *Taking Stock: Selected Poems of Akhtar-ul-Iman* is drawn from the opening sentence of the foreword to the author's collected works published in India in 1983. He states, "Recently [at about age 67], I took stock of my effects and all I could find is what you now hold in your hands" (p. 3): his collected works. In this essay the poet offers his opinions on the nature and function of poetry, his view of the role of the poet in society, and, perhaps most interesting of all, recollections of his youth—living with his parents in an orphanage, for which his father, an *alim*, was the chief peripatetic fund-raiser.

The ninety-four poems in this volume are drawn from his eight collections, which span over forty years of poetic creativity. These poems demonstrate what the poet calls his idea of life: "passing the days"—something which "is not a conscious effort but is rather the lot that man has to cope with somehow." The act of giving "some meaning to this passing of the days is, in reality, literature and poetry."

One of the pleasures of having available so many works written over a long period of time is to analyze and compare earlier poems with later ones in order to look for changes which might have occurred. Thus in "Deprivation" (p. 17)—an early poem written between 1936 and 1939—the lover addresses the beloved: "You are not fate, nor the pain forever." What they have shared in the past has "vanished like the night's last tear." The hope for reconciliation "too has faded." He is torn between a desire to reconcile with her and his felt need to assert his autonomy, which is manifested through the denial that she, too, is suffering.

In terms of its imagery, theme, and rhetoric, this poem is rather traditional. The lover's understated cockiness and belligerence toward the beloved taints the piece with a certain "modernity." Feeling himself a wronged lover, he wants to try to get over his beloved, to attempt to live without her, to adjust to this "deprivation" in his life. The poem is a portrait of a young man; the poem, too, is the work of a young man.

By contrast, the opening of "Compromise" (pp. 102-103)—written between 1961 and 1969—is startling, and decidedly unromantic: "When I

kissed her, the cigarette reek invaded my nostrils." Though he considers smoking "a vice," he has become used to this imperfection of hers. Similarly, "She, too, has become reconciled to my discoloured teeth." And though their souls may be "dead," when they meet

[...] in loneliness, in darkness,
 We become like wet clay.
 Hate is absorbed, only silence remains:
 Silence, which engulfed the earth after
 creation.
 We keep breaking like young branches.
 We do not discuss dreams that we once
 had.
 We do not discuss long buried joys.
 We just keep breaking.
 I am inclined to drinking, she smokes.
 We keep getting wrapped in the sheet
 of silence.
 We keep breaking like young branches.

"The Boy" (pp. 60-61), one of Akhtar-ul-Iman's most famous poems, presents a highly evocative, lyrical moment in which the speaker sees himself as a small boy, a kind of *Doppelgänger*, who keeps questioning the speaker about aspects of his life and hauntingly asks three times in the poem: "Are you really Akhtar-ul-Iman?" Furious with the boy's tenacity, the speaker replies:

That depressed, neurotic soul
 You keep enquiring for is long dead.
 I have wrapped him in the shroud of
 self deception,
 And thrown him in the grave of his
 hopes.
 I tell that boy the flame is quenched
 That was bent on burning all the trash
 of the world.

However, as if to reject this deception, and with it, all the speaker's well-defended resistances to self-awareness, the boy merely smiles and replies: "That's a lie, a fib, a cheat. / Look! I'm alive."

In "To the Elusive Life" (pp. 76–77), life is depicted as an elusive woman whom the poet has pursued with little success. Always looking toward "tomorrow" and "Forever getting ready for the big day," he has failed to live in the present. "Heedless, improvident, all I've piled over the years / Is one far deficit."

A well constructed poem with a dominant central image, its English translation suffers from a jarring, decidedly unpoetic, and unfortunate rendering of *jam'a-e nasara* (literally "collection of loss") as "one far deficit." Someone should have told Bakht and Jaeger of this "deficiency" before it appeared in print twice. A similar jolting deficiency is also found in "Hovels" (p. 13), where the translators use "this whole shebang," which is too frivolous and colloquial for serious poetry like Akhtar-ul-Iman's.

Altogether then, the poet who emerges from these translations is one possessed of singular, lyric gifts, a master of setting up dilemmas, contrasts, and oppositions. He writes forceful poems with children's voices in them and love poems with great passion. As with every great poet, we are privileged to witness his "taking stock"; indeed, his "passing the days" as transformed into these poems has been an illustrious journey. One can also discern his subtle influence on the following generation of modernist Urdu poets, which includes Amjad Islam Amjad and Kishwar Naheed.

4. Born in Lahore in 1944, Amjad Islam Amjad writes with distinction both poetry and television plays. However, in spite of his success in this latter arena, he prefers to be known as a poet. He has published five collections of original poems as well as two volumes of Urdu translations of poetry from other countries, including *Ak* (Reflection; 1976), a volume of translations of Palestinian poetry. His other published works are a travelogue, a volume of critical essays, and seven volumes of television plays.

In the Last Days of Autumn: Selection of Poems of Amjad Islam Amjad contains forty-six poems from the author's first four volumes of verse published between 1974 and 1989.

The poem "In the Last Day of Autumn" (pp. 48–49) reflects the tenor and voice of most of the poems presented in this volume: highly romantic, replete with traditional imagery which recalls Urdu poetry at its most amorous and melancholic, a poetry of silences, the unspoken, and might-have-beens. On the lushly described last day of autumn, "She came into the desert of my life / Like a rain-filled cloud; / She perfumed my air.

/ The stars in her eyes, were metaphors of desire." Placing her head on his chest, "She smiled suddenly / And was going to say something," but hearing a nightingale cry out "in agony" (due, no doubt, to separation from its beloved, the rose), she departs. He is left to wonder what her "unfinished sentence" and, by implication, any potential relationship between them, might have been.

Another poem about leave-taking and silences is "How Cruel Is Time!" (p. 59), where the speaker and a woman, probably lovers once, run into one another by chance after a long time. They are surprised. They remain silent. Finally, she manages to ask perfunctorily: "How are you? Not bad, I replied." She: "It's strange to run into you after so long / Meeting an old friend makes one feel good." The objectification and distancing through the use of "one" rather than the more specific "me" is notable. "The city has changed so much . . . / I must run now." He: "I come here every evening / Do come, if you have time / I'm in a rush, too. / Must take your leave!" In this poem as well as "In the Last Day of Autumn," the woman leaves, in the first case, to avoid a possible entanglement, in the second, to avoid another entanglement. The speaker's leave-taking in the latter poem seems ambivalent: he has let her know he comes to that place every evening, yet he leaves, either to be a gentleman and let her leave gracefully, or to save face for himself.

It would be wrong to imply or suggest that Amjad writes only romantic verse. He also has another voice: that of a socially engaged poet whose purview also includes political poems, among them: "A Question" (p. 22), "Dreams for Sale" (p. 22), "A Suggestion" (p. 30), and "Gladiator" (p. 31). "Gladiators" especially, with its powerful imagery, is a damning indictment of, first, the Islamization process during the Bhutto and Zia regimes, which is cast in the same mold as the barbaric gladiatorial combats of decadent Rome, but also the complicity of silence of millions in Pakistan who viewed the imposition of so-called Quranic justice upon some guilty "other":

(1)

When we watch the spectacle of our
own murder,
We whisper into the ears
Of our quick breaths:
The corpse that just fell on the sand,
Was not me;

I am alive.
 Here, look at me!
 My eyes, face, arms,
 Are all in one piece.

(3)

It was only yesterday
 That our hands were being chopped
 off,
 But, snug in our homes,
 We watched the spectacle
 On national T.V.
 We insisted it wasn't us.
 Blood stains are still fresh on our shirts.

A brave poem written in troubled times. Braver still, however, is the poetry of Kishwar Naheed.

5. Kishwar Naheed was born in 1940 in Bulandshahr, U.P. She has a Master's in economics from Punjab University and she is director of the Urdu Science Board of Pakistan. In addition to publishing five collections of Urdu poems, she has translated into Urdu a collection of poems by world poets, a book of biographies and personal impressions of world writers, and the autobiography of Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khalid (b. 1944), *My People Shall Live* (1973). She has written extensively and in depth on a variety of women-related issues, has published a travelogue, textbooks for children, and a number of anthologies.

Naheed's earliest poems, represented in *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice: Selection of Poems of Kishwar Naheed* by eight *ghazal* written between 1958 and 1969, show her as a poet capable of subdued understatement, a requisite of this genre, as well as powerful, direct statement, a requisite for being a feminist living in Pakistan. In one couplet, in what seems to be a complete mastery of the *ghazal* tradition, she turns the tables, as it were, on the traditional lover and shows him in some poems to be as cruel, deceptive, indifferent, etc. as male poets have claimed the female beloved has been. Other couplets have strong political overtones and an oracular sense of warning, which, in light of Pakistan's later political, social, and religious history, have proven bitterly true. For example: "*Naheed*, let my belief suffocate a little bit more. / A storm usually

emerges from calm winds" (p. 5).

A significant image in these early poems, and even some of the later ones such as "Recompense" (p. 32), is laughter, which is presented almost as defiance to the tears that are stereotypically expected of women; this is a laughter not born out of humor, but seems rather to be the only alternative to the anguish inherent in the human condition.

In subsequent volumes of poetry, Naheed turns her focus away from the human condition as a whole and concentrates a good deal of her attention on the condition of women. In the poems of *Binam Masafat* (Nameless Distance; 1971) and *Gahzab, Dagh, Darvaz* (Lanes, Sunshine, Doors; 1978) the poet seems to have found her distinctive voice, one which becomes trenchant, impatient, admonishing (to both men and women), and, to the thinking of some men (including some male members of the literary establishment) and some women, shrill and unladylike.

Several major themes occur in these works. First, a demand for true equality for women, especially in the form of choices; that is, women should have choices in their lives, many more than they now have. This is basically a call for change in the power structure of male-female relationships, which, in turn, will effect profound change at all levels of society.

Second, all people, but especially men, should recognize the achievements of women, whether that achievement is a poem, an office job, a comfortable middle-class home, or giving birth to a child; a corollary to this is that women celebrate and acknowledge as martyrs earlier women persecuted by men: Anarkali, the dancing girl who was walled-in alive for her relationship with the prince who would eventually become the Mughal emperor Jahangir; Qurratulain Tahira, the Iranian poet who was strangled for her unorthodox (read: feminist) views on religion; and the various tragic heroines of Indian literature: Noori, Sassi, Sohni, and Heer.

Third, and very centrally, men ought to grow up emotionally and assume their share of the burden of relationships, whether marriage or even love affairs; a corollary here is that relationships require attention and work, that they don't just happen, and merely because women seem better equipped emotionally to handle them than men, women are not to be the sole caretakers of such relationships. Merely to acknowledge women's superiority here does not get men off the hook.

And fourth, change is a frightening thing, not only in terms of society, mores, religio-political climates, and relationships, especially with

one's children, but even more intimately, one's relationship with one's body. Aging, an inevitable change, is for a woman particularly problematic in a society which allows men to take multiple wives, and accords older women power only in proportion to the number of sons she has produced.

The poem "The Maid" (pp. 36-37) threads together a number of these themes. Here a servant is addressed by another woman (her female employer? another maid? an elder of some kind?) who says that "Serving others / Is serving stones. / You live to be a sister, wife and mother. / Live for yourself too." Seeming to know about such things as "ego" and "existence," she continues with a traditional metaphor drawn from nature: "Look at the lotus flower! / How well it asserts its ego and existence / In surroundings so hostile." Breaking with tradition, the speaker questions the authority of a man—even that of a younger brother over a grown woman's—and audaciously suggests that flirting with other men is a woman's right.

Divorce, or the threat of divorce, as much as the denial women must put themselves through in order to conform to societal norms, especially where children are concerned, are other sources of their continued affliction.

Addressing the maid, the speaker then turns to her own situation, offering yet another flower image: "My dear friend, / Like the sunflower / I turn my head at the command of the master.

The speaker seems to be a woman who, with some regret, has not heeded her own advice; she has not lived for herself either. A victim of tradition, she advocates modernity.

Modernity is also advocated in many other poems, notably expressed as women's sexual interest in men. In "Fear of Dream in a Dream" (p. 23), for example, the addressee seems to be a woman with an office job who is interested in a man, who could be a male fellow-worker or even a neighbor. The poem's title and the identification of the speaker are important. The addressee is distanced from her sexual interest in the man by having her thoughts about him occur not merely in a dream, but a *dream within a dream*. Dreams with sexual content, Naheed indicates in several poems, notably "Hypocrisy" (p. 107), often terrify and confuse young girls and even grown married women. The speaker may well be the addressee herself, her conscience, maybe an elder (female? male?) of some kind. Whoever is speaking, s/he does so in admonishing tones, underscoring the forbidden nature of the thought.

This theme is similarly developed in "In a Split Second" (p. 47). A

woman (the speaker) and a man meet in an elevator. She fails to avert her eyes, as a "proper" South Asian woman would, but makes eye contact: "We looked at each other," she admits, then adds, "that's all," as if to deny the implied cultural sexual overtones in her action. He exits before she does, but she daydreams (the daylight counterpart to erotic nighttime dreams portrayed in "Fear of Dream in a Dream" above) on what might have happened if she had "followed him." She states, "I'd be a corpse in his way." As if she is reading *his* thoughts, distancing such thinking from her own psyche and projecting it onto his, she continues, using traditional poetry to describe the night of union of lovers:

I remember well his thoughts;
They were feelings like wine.
All night, that pleasure intoxicated me;
But by the morning
My body filled with room
In the shape of empty bottles
And ravaged cigarette butts.

The images in this poem, as can be readily seen, are not only traditional but also subtly sexual.

Autumn also seems to be a critical image in the poet's middle poetry, but especially in the later volumes—*Malumaton ke Darmiyān* (Amidst Reproaches; 1981) and *Siyāh Hālīyat men Gulab Rang* (Pink Color in the Black Margin; 1986)—it becomes a basic, sustaining matrix of her verse. In the early poetry, spring and the color green, especially grass (most fully developed in the poem "The Grass Is Like Me," p. 34), are images of renewal and hope, often equated with the power of women to regenerate, both physically and morally, the human race. In the later poetry green gives way to earthen tones, dust, and autumn with its seared leaves, all of which become a dominant cluster of images. Autumn, often in concert with the image of cobwebs, often depicts a sense of entrapment, not only in relationships, social mores, a country with a dubious political situation, but in one's human body as well, especially as one ages. In "Autumn Song" the speaker describes her hands as "dust-ravaged like dry bread" (p. 13). "The Second Birth" (p. 88) is a compelling poem about wives who have "learnt to live / As the doorway dust" while their husbands are treated to the "second birth" of the tide, i.e., visiting prostitutes. In "Save the Sun from the Rain" (pp. 136–137) "Dry leaves" are a reminder of emptiness and unfulfillment; and in "A Picture" (p.

141) "autumn-smitten leaves" are a central image. In the final poem in the volume, "The Scream Peeping from Behind the Closed Door" (pp. 134-135), the speaker describes her fingers as being "like autumn-stricken branches," dry and sore, a complement to the theme of the poem, which is a mature woman's struggle to understand that her life *does* hold both significance and meaning.

A number of Naheed's poems are also obliquely political, especially those written during the Bhutto and Zia regimes. "Constraint" (pp. 42-43) complains that people are choosing to ignore the political realities in which they live by seeking, effectively, the state of "blindness," "deafness," and "dumbness." And in the potent "Speech No. 27" (pp. 44-45) the speaker, who describes her/himself as "not a Messenger" but someone who is "just looking carefully at today," evokes a rhetorical style and revolutionary imagery reminiscent of the works of Josh Malihabadi (d. 1982) and later progressive poets. On the surface, the poem seems to be an attack on the growing acquisitiveness, described as an "animal-smell," of Pakistan's elites, with their "lust for money," "limousines," and "plastic face." It can be read as well as an indictment of Pakistan's political system, in which these same elites hold sway.

Finally, the poem which gives this collection its title, "The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice" (pp. 146-147), is a densely textured, syntactically convoluted poem which, through suggested reversals and oppositions, can be read as a caustic denunciation of those in power. Associations with the word *illegitimate* also include "illegal," and even "subversive." Indeed, *subversive* is a word which aptly describes much of this poetry.

Kishwar Naheed, a poet who is sometimes understated, often confrontational, and always provocative, is witnessing her society in an ambivalent, double-edged transition: not only towards and against westernization, but also against and towards Islamization. Attacking the extremes on either end as menacing and anti-human, she finds the middle position between them ambiguous and tentative, often testing the endurance of anyone's capacity for change. Kishwar Naheed's is a major, unique voice in contemporary Urdu literature not because she is a woman poet, but because she is a powerful, empowering poet whose poetic abilities and literary sensibilities match, and in some instances exceed, those of many of her male counterparts.

To conclude, let us consider a quotation from Walter Benjamin: "This task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he [*sic*] is translating which produces in it

the echo of the original."⁴ Have Bakht and his associates produced translations which have "the echo of the original?" To this question we must answer yes. Therefore, they have succeeded very well.

In this context, it would also be good to remember many of the "basics" which writers on translation, such as Benedetto Croce, Walter Benjamin, George Steiner, Gregory Bateson, etc. have told us before (here presented randomly and without attribution): translation is an ongoing process, not an end, and is never fully achieved. A given translation is one of many possible ones contained within a work. All translations are successful, to a greater or lesser degree; all translations are failures to greater or lesser degree.

For Bakht's translations, we might offer a suggestion here, a disagreement there. For example, introductory essays, such as Faruqi's in the Balraj Komal volume and Akhtrar-ul-Iman's foreword to his own collection, were invaluable in giving context to the texts; similar essays would have been extremely helpful for the remaining volumes. Someone might want more notes (I do); someone else might not. There are also a couple of gaffes in English grammar. But, as the theoreticians of translation remind us, *all* translations and translators are vulnerable. Therefore, we must be careful when we criticize them. Those who have not translated will certainly want to remain silent, and appreciate. Those who have should remember how thankless and impossible a task it is, and appreciate.

⁴See his "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zahn, in ed. Reiner Schulte and John Biguenet, *op cit.*, p. 77.

In "To the Elusive Life" (pp. 76-77), life is depicted as an elusive woman whom the poet has pursued with little success. Always looking toward "tomorrow" and "Forever getting ready for the big day," he has failed to live in the present. "Heedless, improvident, all I've piled over the years / Is one fat deficit."

A well constructed poem with a dominant central image, its English translation suffers from a jarring, decidedly unpoetic, and unfortunate rendering of *jam'a-e xairā* (literally "collection of loss") as "one fat deficit." Someone should have told Bakht and Jaeger of this "deficiency" before it appeared in print twice. A similar jolting deficiency is also found in "Hovels" (p. 13), where the translators use "this whole shebang," which is too frivolous and colloquial for serious poetry like Akhtar-ul-Ismā's.

Altogether then, the poet who emerges from these translations is one possessed of singular, lyric gifts, a master of setting up dilemmas, contrasts, and oppositions. He writes forceful poems with children's voices in them and love poems with great passion. As with every great poet, we are privileged to witness his "taking stock"; indeed, his "passing the days" as transformed into these poems has been an illustrious journey. One can also discern his subtle influence on the following generation of modernist Urdu poets, which includes Amjad Islam Amjad and Kishwar Naheed.

4. Born in Lahore in 1944, Amjad Islam Amjad writes with distinction both poetry and television plays. However, in spite of his success in this latter arena, he prefers to be known as a poet. He has published five collections of original poems as well as two volumes of Urdu translations of poetry from other countries, including *ʿAḳl* (Reflection; 1976), a volume of translations of Palestinian poetry. His other published works are a travelogue, a volume of critical essays, and seven volumes of television plays.

In the Last Days of Autumn: Selection of Poems of Amjad Islam Amjad contains forty-six poems from the author's first four volumes of verse published between 1974 and 1989.

The poem "In the Last Day of Autumn" (pp. 48-49) reflects the tenor and voice of most of the poems presented in this volume: highly romantic, replete with traditional imagery which recalls Urdu poetry at its most amorous and melancholic, a poetry of silences, the unspoken, and might-have-beens. On the lushly described last day of autumn, "She came into the desert of my life / Like a rain-filled cloud; / She perfumed my air.

anticipates in his highly informative and persuasively argued historical and critical Introduction. Clearly, the book makes the recent Urdu short story eminently accessible not only to English-speaking audiences in the West, but also to a large composite group of readers from the Indian subcontinent who do not know the language at first hand, and have to rely on translations either into their various mother-tongues or into English in order to learn about contemporary Urdu writing. At the same time, and equally significantly, this anthology holds Urdu short fiction up to the scrutiny of Urdu readers and writers themselves, who can now see it in its surprisingly revealing and attractive English form, much as "outsiders" and "foreigners" tend to see it. Translation, after all, serves not only as a window through which others look at us, but also as a mirror in which we see ourselves face to face, on the outside and at an irreducible distance. To look at a familiar Urdu short story in an exciting new English version is to see it (at least momentarily) in all its freshness, to perceive its distinctiveness and achievement with greater clarity, and to experience its memorable effects again from unexpected angles.

The main reason why *The Tale of the Old Fisherman* succeeds as it does is its double emphasis on quality. As far as the material itself is concerned, Memoo has exercised his taste and editorial skills admirably: each of the twelve pieces—eleven short stories and one self-contained excerpt from a novel—is energetic, innovative in its own context, and quite interesting. So far as the translations are concerned, each piece is presented in a highly finished literary form in English: although the volume brings together the output of nine Pakistani, Indian, and American translators working individually and in collaboration on twelve different writers, and faithfulness to the original stories demands a variety of voices and styles in the English versions, the collection as a whole maintains a consistently high standard of quality.

To review what *The Tale of the Old Fisherman* accomplishes as a whole, it is perhaps best to discuss the stories in some detail in the chronological sequence in which they were first published and had their original impact on Urdu readers in Pakistan, India, and elsewhere. Such a reading strategy complements the arrangement of the stories in the volume, where they are ordered alphabetically by their authors' names, as well as their discussion in Memon's Introduction, where they are taken up in various stylistic and thematic groupings so as to define a dialectic of experimentation and conventionality. In the following account I would like to reinforce Memon's historical and critical perspective on the individual writers and pieces by replaying the tension between

conservation and innovation, continuity and rupture, along temporal rather than ideological and aesthetic lines. I would thus like to indicate how and why, in any given decade of the twentieth century, the modern Urdu short story constitutes a heterogeneous "discursive space," in which multiple authorial styles and stances coexist and interact constantly, without any one school or movement permanently displacing or erasing another along a linear historical axis. In addition, I would also like to supplement Memon's discussion by broadening out the historical dynamics of the Urdu short story, so as to include comparisons with similar or dissimilar situations in other languages of the Indian subcontinent. A comparative study is likely to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the singular achievements of the contemporary Urdu short story.

II

The earliest story in the collection is Intizar Husain's "The Seventh Door" ("Sāhvān Dar," 1955; translated by Javaid Qazi) and it represents, in several respects, the most "conventional" position in contemporary Urdu short fiction, in relation to which many writers of the subsequent decades seem to situate themselves. It is a polished piece of formalist fiction that focuses on the first person narrator's childhood experience of loss of belief, confusion, and change. However, the fairly simple plot has multiple, complexly interrelated meanings which, on reflection, give the story a great deal of depth. A mother and son live in a house where once many pigeons made their home on a cornice. So long as the pigeons flocked there, the woman's family prospered, but once they abandoned the place "misfortune and anxiety wracked our lives and the family scattered to the winds" (p. 87). Now only one female pigeon nests on the cornice and the little boy accepts his mother's repeated claim that the bird embodies a "holy spirit." But when the boy's slightly older cousin Munni visits them, she mocks his credulous acceptance of his mother's account. Munni forcefully argues that the pigeon must be a fairy, as in the tale about King Bahram who unlocked a proscribed seventh door in his magical palace to find a pool where pigeons dived in and turned into enchanting fairies. Seduced by this alternative conception, the two children decide to capture the solitary pigeon and test the myth, but their clumsy efforts traumatize and drive away the bird. The loss of the pigeon (and, with it, the loss of one or more "cherished beliefs") alienates the cousins from each other,

and leaves the boy struggling with undecipherable forms of guilt, anguish, longing, and loneliness.

As even this partial summary should indicate, Husain's story is overlaid with several symbolic and figurative meanings, and clearly owes something to James Joyce's treatment of childhood and maturation in *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. At the same time, it uses myth and folk material from the subcontinental context, establishing a multivalent intertextual relationship with the Hindi, Urdu, Persian, and Arabic narrative traditions. This combination marks an inaugural moment in the historical and literary trajectory of the new post-Partition Urdu short story (which Memon identifies as the "postrealist" *jadid afiana*). Husain's broadly modernist and what now seems "conservative" stance as a story-teller, however, is not a personal failing on his part, as some of his more virulent critics have made it out to be. In a comparative subcontinental perspective, Husain's work often reveals a striking affinity with that of many important writers of the 1940s and 1950s in other Indian languages, such as Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. A resonant and interesting parallel, for example, occurs in the work of P.S. Rege in Marathi, whose poetry and fiction (especially the novellas *Saviri* and *Analekita* of roughly the same period) draw on symbolism and modernism, myth and tradition, craftsmanship and aestheticism in a comparably distinguished way. In short, Husain's artistic position in the 1950s is not unique, either to him or to the situation of Urdu fiction, but is part of a widespread phenomenon across the subcontinent, which we have yet to unravel in all its complexity and detail.

The four pieces in the anthology that represent the Urdu fiction of the early 1960s stand in sharp or extreme contrast to Husain's conservative aestheticism of the previous decade. Like other major subcontinental languages, Urdu went through a phase of concerted radical experimentation, aesthetic upheaval, and discursive innovation ten to fifteen years after Partition (its first large-scale reaction to the disasters and disappointments of "postcolonialism"). In Bengali, the early 1960s saw the emergence of the Hungry Generation writers; in Marathi, the formation of a long-lasting "avant garde" (modeled on European movements) and the first explosion of Dalit writing; in Hindi, the last instances of G.M. Mukhtibodhi's drastic experiments in prose and verse; and in Kannada, the new poetry of G.K. Adiga, the new fiction of U.R. Ananthamurthy, and the new drama of Girish Karnad. (These innovations, in turn, are not unlinked to a larger, international upheaval at almost exactly the same time—the appearance of the Beat Generation in the United States, for

example, and that of the antipoets and the magical realists in Latin America and Europe.) In *The Tale of the Old Fisherman* this crucial historical moment or phase is represented by the work of Saleem Asmi, Khalida Asghar, Muhammad Umar Memon, and Abdullah Hussein, and it turns out to be a "heterogeneous discursive space" containing experimental as well as technically, socially, and politically conservative writing.

Of the material from the early 1960s, Saleem Asmi's "Fire, Ashes and Water" ("Āg, Xāk, Pānī," 1961; translated by Faruq Hassan) is highly experimental in technique and form as well as in its subject matter. The story is told by three juxtaposed narrators, each with a different point of view; they are differentiated stylistically and typographically from each other in the text, but nevertheless yoked together quite violently into a montage of interior monologues. The characters include three adults (mother, father, *ayab*), and four children (Bajiya or Birjees, the elder sister; Sibbi, the eldest brother; Salloo, their younger brother and one of the narrators; and Saffo, a neighbor's daughter and Birjees's friend). The story is a masterful, deeply disturbing narrative about aggression, exploitation, perversity, victimization, injury, deviance, and sexual incomprehension in a well-to-do Muslim household, told from the shifting double perspective of children in the act of observation and adults remembering their childhood experiences. By suggestion, if not in explicit terms, the story deals in terrifying ways with incest, cruelty, trauma, and social and sexual taboos, moving from father-daughter and mother-son relationships to sister-brother and son-surrogate-mother conflicts, mixing death and violence with desire and power. Clearly, the children's world Asmi creates is the antithesis of Intizar Husain's world of "childhood enchantment" in "The Seventh Door." As Memon remarks, Asmi's piece is an unusually successful extreme appropriation of the stream-of-consciousness technique from the Anglo-Irish modernists (the other notable instance being Qurratulain Hyder's novel *River of Fire* [*Āg ka Daryā*, 1959, which also drew on Virginia Woolf and James Joyce). In fact, Asmi's piece is exceptional even in a much wider Indian context: it is a *tour de force* compared to, say, B.S. Madhkar's attempts at stream-of-consciousness in his fiction of the 1940s in Marathi, or Krishna Baldev Vaid's similarly failed attempts in Hindi in the 1960s.

Abdullah Hussein's "The Tale of the Old Fisherman" ("Jalliyānwāla Bāg," from *Udāt Nasīb*, ca. 1963; translated by C.M. Naim and Gordon Roadarmel), the title piece of the volume and not a short story proper but a self-contained excerpt from a full-length novel (the only excerpt in the book), is an equally complex and disturbing narrative but far less

experimental than Asmi's story. In style and technique it seems "conservative" and closer in quality and effect to Intizar Husain's story—the piece blends the literary and the folk, the realistic and the fantastic, the literal and the symbolic, without surface pyrotechnics. But at the same time it is an extremely daring narrative, for it retells the story of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 in the form of an old, illiterate, poor fisherman's rambling eyewitness account, given to a group of later visitors to the garden. Hussein captures the monumentality and tragedy of the event with impeccable precision, imaginatively accommodating fact to fiction with an intricacy that makes Salman Rushdie's treatment of the same event in *Midnight's Children*, for example, seem disconcertingly tame and superficial.

In contrast, Khalida Asghar's "The Wagon" ("Savart," ca. 1963; translated by Memon), considered a classic modern short story in Urdu, is unmistakably experimental and "avant garde" in its narrative strategy and overall impact. It is an abstractly psychological story that has a powerfully hallucinatory effect on the reader even in translation. It unfolds as a condensed allegory of modernization and of urban experience in the nuclear age, depicting a city on the Indian subcontinent as an incomprehensible, uncontrollable, unpredictable, ominous, and ultimately primordial environment whose citizens become victims of processes which they cannot detect or name. The story, written more than twenty years before the Bhopal Union Carbide accident in 1984 and the Chernobyl reactor meltdown in 1986, imagines with terrifying suggestiveness the effects of a large-scale industrial or technological catastrophe on an ordinary individual's life and on the life of an entire city or region. It is a perfectly controlled verbal and imaginative experiment in fantasmagoric story-telling that has only increased in its "prophetic powers" with the passage of time. It is, again, a story that constitutes a narrative pole opposite to that of Intizar Husain's work in the previous decade, as well as Abdullah Hussein's prose produced at almost exactly the same time as Asghar's.

Muhammad Umar Memon's "The Dark Alley" ("Tirk Gali," 1963; translated by Faruq Hassan) perhaps occupies the middle ground between these two apparent extremes. It is a fascinating reworking of some of the themes of Munshi Premchand's most famous Hindi-Urdu short story, "The Shroud" ("Kafan," ca. 1936), as well as a tenacious exploitation of the whole nexus of cultural issues that arise in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian subcontinental situations with conflicts between religious belief and secularism, tradition and modernity, Muslim or Hindu

communitarian identity and cosmopolitan Western education, humane values and empty ritual, immediate feeling and mediating dogma. It is a sustained psychological, social, and broadly cultural probing into the nature of death and blasphemy, religious institutions and the business of living, and rites of passage and the experience of passage itself. "The Dark Alley" strikingly dramatizes the situation of secular modernity in a conservative small-town Muslim social milieu with courage, insight, and sensitivity, often unraveling problems that have become publicly dangerous once more in the three decades since the story was written.

III

The foregoing discussion suggests that during the 1950s and 1960s Urdu fiction writers came to occupy a variety of positions with regard to material, strategy, technique, and narrative construction. As Memon argues in his Introduction, each of these positions went beyond the insipid, mechanical "social realism" of the earlier Progressive writers. In my historicist reading of *The Tale of the Old Fisherman*, the dialectic of innovation and conventionality entered a new cycle around 1970, one that appears to have come full circle in multiple loops towards the end of the 1980s. Some of the repetitions, variations, and radical alternations involved in this process become visible when we turn to the more recent material in the anthology.

Two stories first published around 1970 once more define at its maximum the divergence between the "experimental" and "conventional" modes of story-telling. Of the pair, Enver Sajjad's "Scorpion, Cave, Pattern" ("Bicēhū, Ġar, Naql," 1970; translated by Frances W. Pritchett) is the radically innovative one in narrative strategy and authorial stance: it takes several pages out of an Alain Robbe-Grillet *nouvelle roman* in French, and transposes them with great freshness, verve, and imaginative complexity on the palimpsest of contemporary Urdu. At the other end, Iqbal Majeed's "Two Men, Slightly Wet" ("Dō B'htē Hū'ē Lāg," ca. 1970; translated by C.M. Naim) is a relatively conventional story—again, at least at first glance—about an accidental encounter between two strangers seeking shelter from unexpected rain on an ordinary city afternoon. After much resistance and discomfort on the protagonist's part, the two men strike up an acquaintance that becomes the occasion for the protagonist's self-definition and self-discovery. What makes the story subtle and unusual is its quiet but suggestive interweaving of the themes of

strangeness, alienation, suspicion, openness, friendship, mystery, and understanding, and generally its play on the knowledge and ignorance of social types, varieties of experience, and multiplicity of perspectives that marks any encounter between "the self" and its "Other."

The sharp qualitative and affective differences between Sajjad and Majeed's stories are substantially modified by Masud Ashar's "Of Coconuts and Chilled Beer Bottles" ("Dāb aur Bi'r ki Thāndī Bōtal," 1974; translated by Memon). In my judgment this piece, along with Saleem Asmi's "Fire, Ashes and Water" from a decade earlier, is technically and culturally the most complex and fascinating story in the collection. Ashar uses Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a palimpsest to narrate and dramatize a group of West Pakistani men's encounter with the landscape and life of East Pakistan (or Bangladesh). Ashar's story has a fantasmagoric structure and quality which, in retrospect now, would classify easily as a very significant experiment in magic realism well before the genre became commonplace and fashionable in the international literary world. The men from Pakistan—careless, irreverent, inebriated, and even callous, basically out to have some boisterous fun as close friends—undertake a riverboat journey into the Sundarbans area with their Bengali-Muslim host. In the course of the journey they discover not only their own and their eastern counterparts' insensitivities and peculiarities, but also the unnerving complexity of cross-cultural interaction within what was supposed to be the "same" (but geographically fragmented) national community called "Pakistan," as well as the insurmountable, surreal, nightmarish hyperreality of social differences and cultural incomprehensions. Ashar's admirable accomplishment lies in his ability to articulate and bring alive the most intractable "themes" in his narrative, and to compress them effortlessly into a narrative that has no comparable parallels for density, weight, and range in, say, Hindi or Indian-English fiction that I can think of (including such complex works as G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter* and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*).

Toward the end of the 1970s, experimentation appears to take a different turn in Muhammad Salimur Rahman's "Siberia" ("Sā'bīriyā," 1979; translated by Wayne Husted, Memon, and Ursula LeGuin), which is an intricately worked out political allegory of life in bureaucratic and middle-class Pakistan under General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. Here Rahman employs the method of constructing a systematic parallel between a relatively well-known narrative situation (say, Solzhenitsyn's accounts, from *Cancer Ward* to *The Gulag Archipelago*) and a little-known one (Pakistan in the late 1970s, or more generally under postcolonial military

dictatorships), paying close attention to the details of daily life and to the fine-tuned evocation of circumstance and atmosphere. For readers discovering Rahman's story at a considerable distance from its location, his most startling invention is the introduction of heavy snow on a subtropical landscape, which transforms the whole setting into a bitterly cold, inhuman gulag of the imagination.

The general heterogeneity constituted by the stories of the 1970s in this collection is, in turn, altered significantly by the material from the next decade. In some respects Hasan Manzar's "The Poor Dears" ("Bēdārē," 1981; translated by Memon) is, for me, one of the most unexpected and rewarding pieces in the anthology, because it suddenly enlarges the thematic scope of the fiction represented here. It is the first-person narrative of a Muslim immigrant from the Indian subcontinent to England, who has an attractive English girlfriend, a house, and an endearing housekeeper in London. The story unfolds around his visit (after many years), not only to India and Pakistan but also, in the same imaginative stretch, to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Thailand. In the course of his complicated and unusual journey, the protagonist experiences discovery and re-discovery, alienation and difference, empathy and engagement—from the Angkor War monument and Sri Lankan Buddhist *stupas* to the cathedral dedicated to St. Francis Xavier and a "congregation" performing a *Meera bhajan* in Pakistan. It is a sensitive, savvy, "synthesizing" account of the kind of intellectual and emotional journey which the new post-colonial immigrants in the West constantly undertake, but which few manage to write about with so much skill in the other Indian languages. I find Manzar's fiction far "truer" and more "honest" than, say, some of Bharati Mukherjee's clever fantasies about subcontinental immigrants in *The Middleman and Other Stories* and *Jasmine*, and more nuanced, sympathetic, and agreeable than some of Rushdie's fabulations in *The Satanic Verses*. Mainly because of its casually articulated sanity, Manzar's story may well carry more weight than the dazzling and ambitious work of some of his famous contemporaries in Indian-English fiction.

While Manzar's story in the final analysis innovates on theme as well as form to produce a geographically wide-ranging narrative that covers half the globe, Zamiruddin Ahmad's "Purvai—The Easterly Wind" ("Purvā'ī," 1987; translated by Memon) accomplishes much the same within the very narrow circle of domestic life in north India. It is a marvelously achieved piece of social and psychological realism, which focuses not only on the drama of the various characters' situations but also, more rivetingly, on the effect of those exchanges on their minds.

There are surprising parallels between "Purvai" and Joyce's "The Dead," which remain pleasurable because of the differences in setting, situation, and character which Ahmad plays with throughout his narrative. In this story he gives us an average more-or-less middle-class Muslim home in post-Partition India, an urban nuclear family (the couple in their early thirties, their only son not quite a teenager yet), the burden of routine household chores and family responsibilities which is carried mostly by the woman, and especially her frame of mind as a housewife held in tightly by the net of love, sexuality, and desire within a monogamous marriage. Her accidental non-encounter with an "old flame" in the town's main street (he is now a distinguished public figure in Pakistan, on a rare visit to north India) arouses her deeply and inexplicably. But her arousal and the nonfulfilment of desire are not causes of unhappiness—instead, they lead to a new subliminal self-recognition on the part of the woman, her unaware husband, and of course the reader. It seems to me that the story effectively displaces the familiar patrilineal, polygamous vision of the world in order to explore female sexuality within the possibilities of a matrilineal, polyandrous alternative vision in a bold and highly nuanced way. With Ahmad's story we move back towards the technically "conventional" but thematically innovative position we encountered much earlier in the work of the 1960s and 1970s, enacting a historical return without repetition.

In one final contrast, Surrender Parkash's "Wood Chopped in the Jungle" ("Jāngal se Kṛpī Hū'ī Lakṛiyāh," ca. 1988; translated by Sagaree S. Korom) is another instance of rejuvenated high experimentalism in contemporary Urdu, although now the points of intertextual reference have changed significantly. If for Asmi around 1960 the texts and techniques of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce were a source of overflow, and for Enver Sajjad around 1970 those of Alain Robbe-Grillet were vital points of departure, then for Parkash around 1980 and later the sparks of ignition may have been in Latin American magic realism, especially Jorge Luis Borges's *Labyrinths* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novels and short stories. Parkash's difficult, obscure story about a crucified male reminds me of both Borges' and Garcia Marquez's "mythmaking" narratives, particularly the latter's "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," which is itself reminiscent of modernist myths of the sacrificed fisher-king and the hanged god in *The Golden Bough* and *The Waste Land*. What is particularly interesting about Parkash's story in this context is that it has a strong strategic and affective affinity with Khalida Asghar's "The Wagon," written some twenty-five years earlier. What is pertinent historically in a

comparative Indian context is that both Asghar and Parkash reveal strong similarities with "experimental" and "avant garde" writers in other Indian languages who, during the same period (from the late 1950s to the late 1980s), have cultivated almost identical fictional terrains in terms of technique, style, theme, and form. The best parallels I can offer are, of course, Doodhnath Singh's "Chorus" (1967) in Hindi and Vilas Sarang's "Rabbit" (1969) in Marathi, which can be analyzed closely on a continuum with Asghar and Parkash's fictions. Like Asghar and Parkash, Singh and Sarang have helped give the "experimentalism" of modernity a new edge in contemporary South Asia.

IV

In conclusion, as I suggested earlier, *The Tale of the Old Fisherman* brings together a dozen remarkable post-Partition Urdu short stories in English versions of a high quality. The anthology provides an outsider or an uninitiated reader (like me) with a substantial quantity and range of material in its selection of stories, as well as a strong critical and historical orientation towards modern Urdu fiction in its Introduction. The book as a whole succeeds in achieving its stated objectives, and goes beyond them to stimulate its various kinds of potential readers into rethinking a number of vital issues raised by the modern literatures of the Indian subcontinent. Perhaps most significantly, it opens up for writers and critics in other Indian languages both a new area of literary experience, and a new domain of comparative studies, in which, say, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada, and Indian English literatures can be read and discussed critically, from now onwards, in each other's liberating contexts.

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A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures

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Parveen Shakir: A Note and Twelve Poems

A MOST INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT in Urdu literature since 1947 has been the emergence of an increasing number of women poets who have contributed to Urdu poetry what, several generations earlier, other women had to Urdu fiction: a more intimately feminine voice and a range of themes containing what had not been expressed before—a woman's experience within the Urdu-speaking urban milieu. It is noteworthy that this development occurred in Pakistan, where an average Muslim woman's life has been much more restricted in certain ways than in India. Perhaps it reflects the creative power of the challenges in Pakistan less than the decline in Urdu education in India, where, one suspects, Muslim women poets of this kind are more likely to come forth in literatures other than Urdu. Be that as it may, there is a triad of Pakistani women poets whose individual talents must receive primary credit. Parveen Shakir is the youngest of the three, the other two—chronologically senior to her—being Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz. Naheed and Riaz created the space within which Shakir's poetry successfully found its own voice.

Shakir has so far published four books of poetry. Each contains *ghazals* as well as *nagms*. The *ghazal* demands a language that is ruthlessly concise yet rich in suggestiveness; it also requires its listeners/readers to bring to it their own experiential specificity, context, and elaboration, as well as their own acquired literary knowledge. The *nagm*, on the other hand, allows the poet to elaborate: the poet often strings out specific contexts and invites us to keep company as he or she discovers the poem in that process. These are two quite different modes of perception and creation. Shakir is good at both. Her *ghazals* are a noteworthy contribution to Urdu literature in their own right, some of them carrying the vivid impress of a distinctively feminine voice. The latter is reflected not merely

in the consistent use of a grammatical feminine gender or the references to feminine attire and social contexts, but in something much more, as in the couplet:

dil nā lamah sakāyā kyā, p'ir b'ā sarāf-kā dekā
lā

lā-garān-e lahr kē bārē kā ye kamāl b'ā

It's doubtful that our heart would be
 made brilliant, but let's go get it cut
 anyway.

Let's have this experience too of the
 mastery of the city's crystal-carvers.

I may be wrong, but I feel that this verse, with its rare use of the intransitive but active *sarāf-kā* could arise only from a sensibility anchored in a woman's experience in Urdu society.

By the time Shakir's first collection, *Khidā*, appeared in 1977, she was already well known through magazines and *maḥāṣus*. The book went through a second printing within six months, a rare honor for any book in Urdu, and has remained in print since then. It contains an interesting introduction by the poet, entitled "From the Flower's Casement." This is how it begins:

On the crumbling threshold of fleet-footed moments, holding on to the arms of the wind, a girl stands and wonders: what should she tell you? Years ago, in the still hours of some night, she had prayed to God that He should reveal to her the girl inside her. I am sure God must have smiled, at least once, at the simplicity of that prayer—girls of tender age don't know that no greater calamity befalls those who dwell on earth than self-knowledge—but He granted her the request. And so, at an age when others wish for the moon, she received the magic word that would let her into the thousand-gated city of the Self.

This is highly mannered prose, much too precious, but one cannot help admiring the confidence with which it was used by the young author.

What is more interesting here is the poet's description of herself. She calls herself a "girl" (*larkī*), not a "woman" (*aurat*), and later we discover that she seems as much aware of her charms as she is of her young age. She expects to be loved and desired by someone, just as she

herself wants to love and desire another. She is determined that the two experiences must be equally honestly felt and given a voice. Later in the Introduction, she explains the title of the book: "When the breeze kissed the flower, fragrance [*khushbu*] was born." She is the "flower," and her poems emerge out of the encounters with the "breeze," with those who are drawn to her. But the poems are not mannered; in fact, many have a certain throw-away charm to them. That is as true of the simple lines of "To a Friend" in her first book of poems as of the delightful minuet of a poem, "To a Victorian Man" in her third book.

By pointing to Shakir's use of the word *lark* (girl) for herself, I don't mean to imply that it is something special to her alone. If anything, it is special to all the women poets of the post-1947 generation; they self-consciously use the word, with all its connotations of innocence, playfulness, budding sexuality, societally expected gender roles, etc. The earlier women poets mostly spoke in the adult's voice of high seriousness, no different from their male counterparts. On the other hand, in contrast to the women, men wrote, and still write, about childhood, but seldom about "boyhood," certainly never about adolescent sexuality and gender roles. Incidentally, the latter topic was present even in the poems of Muhammadi Begum, in the first decade of this century, though not as something to question or even to examine. (Girls were/are expected to become mothers, but fatherhood was/is never mentioned in the context of a boy's future.)

One may note here a poem from Shakir's first volume. Entitled "Mas'ala" (The Problem), it describes an encounter with Fahmida Riaz, who tells her:

Parveen, as I watched you read
I remembered my old self—
the days when I'd write like you.
But now those poems are faint dreams;
I've 'disowned' all of them.

Her own hands held in the "jasmine-soft" hands of the senior poet, Shakir wonders if the "simple 'Alice' inside her" would ever be able to "disown" herself. She doubts it very much. As she puts it in another poem, "*Tanqid aur Taaliq*" (Criticism and Creativity), "I don't wish that my art / grow old before it's young."

Her second volume is entitled *Sadburg* (Marigold, 1980). That is not, however, the common Urdu name for the flower, and thus its use

here is ambivalent. The word literally means "hundred petals" and as such it may also imply an experience of being torn apart. This is evident in the increased bitterness in many of the poems in that collection. There are also many more poems that are overtly socio-political in reference. Her third book, *Kud-Kalām* (Soliloquy, 1984), is dedicated to her son, Murad. As may be expected, in addition to further explorations of love and desire and separation and disillusionment, it also contains a number of poems dealing with the experience of becoming and being a mother. These are joyful poems, full of energy and confidence. But the eponymous final poem is a cry of pain, the poet being no longer sure of any possibility of human communication. These same themes continue in the fourth book, *Iskār* (Refusal, 1990), which also contains a section entitled "Prose Poems." These differ from the rest, however, only in being somewhat prosaic in their language.

As one goes through Shakir's four volumes, one is struck by the autobiographical tone of much of her poetry. One also feels that the poems were arranged in the books in almost the chronological order of their composition. Thus one may read in them the growth of the "girl" into a "wife," a "mother," and finally a "woman" who is a wife/mother/poet/wage earner and much more. She doesn't, however, write in a confessional mode; there is not in her poetry much in the way of deep psychological probings or a struggle with one's own demons. In that sense, Shakir's poetry is fairly tranquil. At most, she seems merely to confide in us, gently. Since these confidences—generally in terms of feelings and ideas, not individualized experiences—are direct and heartfelt, they make for attractive enough poems. When they are also enhanced by a particularized context, a telling detail or a precise image, they become memorable.

Urdu poets (male or male-voiced) conventionally adopted the persona of a lover. In fact, as lovers, they sometimes appeared to be independent of any beloved, and entirely enthusiastic about "Love" alone. Shakir and other women poets write about a love that is neither self-enthusiastic nor self-engrossed, it cherishes reciprocity and, while it lasts, is notably mutual. Their desire to love goes hand in hand with a desire to be loved. What often comes as the greatest surprise to an unaccustomed Urdu reader is the palpable sensuality in some of their poems; it is of a different order from that attempted by any male poet in Urdu. Come to think of it, I cannot immediately recall any genuinely sensuous poem in Urdu by a male poet, except for one or two by Miraji. It appears to me that for most male poets in Urdu the consummation of love seems to be

either a sexual conquest or a transcendental experience—in either instance lacking in any expression of mutuality.

Further, the new women poets, including Shakir, have written on a range of experiences within marital love which no male poet ever wrote about in Urdu. Sexual intimacy, pregnancy, childbirth, infidelity, separation and divorce—these are topics that one would look for in vain in the books of contemporary male poets, not to mention their predecessors. To give one example, only due to these women poets do we now have some fine poems on the experience of being a mother; sad to say, no male poet has yet written in Urdu a poem about being a father. (There are, of course, any number of hortatory poems by male poets addressed to "sons.")

Some other interesting poems scattered through her four books deal with the experience of being a woman poet in a male-dominated society. These deal with patronizing senior poets (male and female), predatory critics and intellectuals, and other somewhat familiar, though—for Urdu—not much written about, topics. One poem which is unusually effective is entitled "*Nasûta*" (It Has Been Written . . .). In it she tries to explain to her young son why he shouldn't feel embarrassed if most people seem to know him as "the poet's son" rather than the father's. By putting a quotation from the Arabic at the beginning, Shakir has made her particular experience timeless within the Urdu/Islamic milieu of her poetry.

The language of Shakir's poems may be ornate, literary or simple, but it is never overly colloquial. There is always an impression of care and restraint, particularly in the *gazals*. There may be echoes of other voices—Faiz and Ahmad Faraz, to name the more obvious—but even a cursory reading of her poetry makes it evident that these are only echoes, not imitations. One is particularly impressed by the precision and economy of expression in her *gazals*. That is sometimes not the case in the *sagrus*, particularly the longish ones. For example in the political poem entitled "*Sâhazâdi ka Alamiya*" (The Princess's Tragedy), one gets the feeling that the long preceding section was written after the "poem" of the final five lines had been conceived. In other words, the poem didn't discover itself as the poet wrote it. Contrast this with the equally political but more organically conceived poem "For the Iranian Poetess, Farûgh Farrukhzad" or the delightfully sardonic "What Will Happen to Flowers?"

Now that Faiz has long faded from her horizon, Shakir may do well to turn to the other two great masters of the post-Iqbal generation: Miraji and N.M. Rashid. The former can lead her into the anguish and pleasures

of "confessions" while the latter can teach anyone a great deal about creating and sustaining tonal and ideational complexity within a single long poem. These remarks are not meant to take anything away from Shakir's quite significant achievement in Urdu verse, but merely aim to suggest a task worthy of her. Shakir is a prolific writer: over six hundred *ghazals* and *nazms* in the four published collections. But in every one of those collections, there are enough finely crafted poems to reward even an exacting reader. It's not the copious output but these more sharply realized poems that raise Shakir above the rank of most of her contemporaries, male or female.

Poems

A SIMPLE REQUEST

Lord, I know the duty of a hostess,
but please let it be that this year
either rain clouds visit me
or my loneliness.

OBSTINATE

Why should I be the first to phone?
He knows too:
last night came the first monsoon.

TO A FRIEND

Listen, girl, these moments are clouds:
you let them pass and they're gone.
Soak up their moist touch. Get
drenched.
Don't waste a single drop.
Listen, downpours don't remember
streets,
and sunshine can't read roadsigns.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

Will you too be like others:
 put yesterday's dark against today's
 bright?
 Well, please yourself . . . but bear in
 mind:
 they also charge: the sun sleeps with
 night!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO FLOWERS?

I hear
 butterflies will again be banished,
 and bees will get pollen mailed to
 them—
 "They mustn't flit from rose to rose!"
 And breeze will have to watch its step.
 Bees, butterflies, even breeze
 shall see only whom the law approves.
 But,
 did anyone think of the flower's fate?
 How many can self-pollinate?

A POEM FOR THE IRANIAN POETESS,
 FARUGH FARRUKHZAD (1934-1967)

Please tell our lord, the king's good
 friend,
 that His Holiness came today and
 confirmed:
 the crop of sinners is ripe again.
 Tell him, his reapers stand ready.
 They wait to be told which hands to
 cut,
 which tongues to slash, which fields to
 burn.
 They want to know the names of the [...]

doomed.

They should be told which woman to
stone,
which child to impale on a virile man.
They wait to learn the names of the
killers
who must receive the benefit of the
doubt,
and the innocents who should be
hanged?
But tell our lord to bear in mind
this one request:
he must always give verbal orders;
writing only causes headaches.

IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN . . .

" . . . then Zaid cursed Bakar, 'Your mother
is more well known than your father!' "

My son,
this curse is your fate too.
In a fathers' world you too, one day,
must pay a heavy price
for being known by your mother,
though your eyes' color, your brow's
expanse,
and all the curves your lips create
come from the man
who shared with me in your birth,
yet alone gives you significance
in the eyes of the law-givers.

But the tree that nurtured you three
seasons
must claim one season as its own,
to comb the stars, turn thoughts into
perfumes,
make poems leapfrog your ancestors' walls . . . [...]

a season that Mira couldn't send away,
nor could Sappho.

Now it must be this family's fate
that you should frequently feel abashed
before your playmates, and that your
father
must grin and bear it among his friends.
The name on the doorbell means
nothing;
the world knows you by one name
alone.

A BIT OF ADVICE

If
in the course of a conversation
gaps of silence begin to occur,
spoken words turn silent;
therefore, my eloquent friend,
let's carefully listen
to this silence.

I'M HAPPY TO REMAIN A BUTTERFLY

Midnight of my passing years . . .
Did someone knock on the mute
shutters
or was I scared in a dream?

What house of love is this?
Such frightening rocks litter its base,
its windowpanes already chatter.
Perhaps the dread lies inside me
more than anywhere out there.
My dread of his handsome looks,
my awe of his mind,
my fear of a dance of wild abandon [...]

before his pursuing eyes
 Mere covers.

I don't wish to say: "There he is,"
Why should I lose what years have
gained:
my life of freedom, my free mind?
I know if I ever fell into his hands
he'd swiftly turn me into a housefly.
Confined to the walls of his desires,
I'd forget I had ever known
the joys of light, breeze and perfume.

Yes, I'm happy to remain a butterfly: though life's needs conspire against me at least my wings are still intact.

Review

How long did we sit engrossed in talk
under the flowering jacaranda tree?
I don't know. I only know,
the moon crept out from behind the
tree
and placed its fingers across our eyes.

To a Victorian Man

Instead of keeping me tucked away
in some safe corner of your heart—
instead of struggling with Victorian
manners,
in the days of Elizabeth II—
instead of combing world literature
to create one-word conversations—
instead of a vigil below my window
at every Spring's first dawn—
just step forward [...]

one day, out of nowhere,
and gathering me inside your arms
turn a perfect circle on your heels.

WHO THEN HAD THE TIME TO MEET HERSELF?

That I'd manage to glue together the
slivers
of my shattered pride,
repair the tattered wings of my aborted
flights,
and obtain my body's leave to bid you
farewell—
I didn't know.
I had learned so little about myself.
Otherwise this ritual of saying goodbyes
could have ended long ago;
I could've found my courage earlier.
But who then had the time to meet
herself?

"I returned to the houses I had seen many times and located these domains of fear and desire." —title story

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Classics Revisited

Mayhem in Paradise

PIQUED BY WHAT APPEARED TO HIM TOO cavalier a treatment of Salahuddin Ayyubi by Walter Scott in *The Talisman*, his novel about the Crusades, Abdul Halim Sharar made up his mind to become a writer of historical fiction himself. The intention perhaps was not to set the record straight but to concoct a romantic mishmash of chauvinism, glorification of the past and random nostalgia. Decisions which change a man's life are not always sensible ones.

In the case of Sharar the trouble obviously is that he was a casual reader, jumping to conclusions without a second thought, and it is doubtful if he read other novels by Scott or read them right. There is more to Scott than cheap history-mongering—his deep sense, for example, of the Scottish locale. His characters, it has been aptly said, are embedded in a context of tradition. Sharar's fiction—clipped incidents from history—suffers from toothlessness. History in it is not interpreted or validated, but trivialized.

Born in 1860, just as the Muslims in India, bludgeoned into submission by the trauma of 1857, were dazedly searching for a new sense of identity, Sharar's sensibility may have found the general air of insecurity a great dampener. The desultory schooling which he received, in which English was not included, left him, in the changed circumstances, unfit for any profitable job. However he was practical enough to learn English on his own and later on a three-year stay in England, made possible when he was chosen as a tutor to a *naib*'s young son, must have led to a better comprehension of the language.

While the Indian society was undergoing a hesitant metamorphosis, new opportunities were also turning up. It was now possible to choose journalism or publishing or both as a career. The world of Urdu

journalism was still undisciplined and precarious and Sharar entered it with some trepidation but soon found it very congenial or addictive. In a sense, he never outgrew it. He began to publish *Dilgudat*, a magazine of his own in which he serialized his novels. It is claimed that his novels were very popular and the magazine a success. Circumstantial evidence suggests otherwise. From 1887 onwards, when the first issue of *Dilgudat* came out, he suspended its publication at least five times, abandoning it as soon as a chance to do something else presented itself, and restarted it only when no other options were left. Perhaps in his heart of hearts he saw the whole affair as a drudgery. When he died in 1916, the author of nearly a hundred books, one-third of them fiction, he was a well-known figure, but as an editor and publisher he was still struggling to survive.

The consensus is that *Firdaus-e Bahr* (The Sublime Paradise) is the best or at any rate the most popular of his historical novels. The theme itself, built around the intricate machinations of the Iran-based *Bayisya*, a ruthless secret medieval society, is of absorbing interest and even Sharar, with his awkward prose and clumsy craftsmanship, could not quite succeed in stripping it of its appeal.

The principal characters are Husain and Zamurrud, two young lovers. They accidentally fall into the clutches of the *Bayisya* whose adherents carried out assassinations at the behest of their superiors. The high drama in the novel comes from the delineation of the web of deceit woven around Husain by the *Bayisya*. He is completely taken in and commits two particularly gruesome murders so that he can gain admittance to paradise—an artifice gorgeously planned by the *Bayisya* to delude their disciples—and meet Zamurrud whom he believes to be dead and changed into a *bahr*. In fact she is not dead but merely a pawn in the deadly games the *Bayisya* play. The way in which they brainwash the victims, typified here by Husain, appears convincing. The esoteric and metaphysical details which accompany the act, however, are less plausible. Historically some of the particulars in Sharar's work can be discredited and a number of incidents are too preposterous, but the novel derives its strength from an idea and not from historical accuracy. The idea is simple. Promise your followers paradise on earth and a life of sensual pleasure and give them a historical cause, however travestied, and they will blindly follow you. The *Bayisya* held out this promise, and in fact they went it one better by actually fabricating a paradise. Those who excelled in serving the ringleaders were let into it for a while to whet their appetite. It was thuggery in style.

The other striking portion of the novel is the destruction at the

hands of the Mongol army of the mountainous stronghold of the *Bagis* which also housed the sham elysium. The narration of the havoc wrought by the assailants is unimpressive. Sharar's imagination and language are not equal to the task. The manner in which Husain is allowed to kill the archons of the *Bagis* primarily responsible for hoodwinking him is a naïveté fit only for poorly conceived fiction for boys. The fascination which the account of the sack holds for the reader stems from the paradox that while the image of a paradisiacal place is pleasurable, the very notion of ravaging and burning it is, somehow, equally agreeable. Perhaps it helps to activate some atavistic barbarism in us.

So these are the things which make *Firdaus-e Baris* partly memorable. No one, having read it, would care, given the choice, to read it again. But reading it once is enough. Some of its scenes stay in one's memory. This is what constitutes the book's strength and confers on it the status of a minor classic.

Sharar's prose—lacking poise and style, and complacently commonplace and turgid by turns—is often disappointing. It was laughed at by many of his contemporaries who nicknamed him "Sharar & Co." because he constantly misused *kā*, a postposition in Urdu. To be fair to him we must not lose sight of the fact that he was essentially a journalist who wrote quickly and without much thought. He might have fared better had he not felt so harried most of the time. As an observer of the national politics he was not without a certain perspicacity, and suggested nearly a hundred years ago that India should be divided to allow the Hindus and the Muslims to live separately and in peace. He could not have foreseen the huge armies which have sprouted in the subcontinent after 1947 and our mounting belligerence. Only there are no paradises to be pillaged now.

A Classic—In Eclipse

SHAMEFULLY NEGLECTED BY THE CRITICS and passed over by the publishers, *Nishtar*—first published nearly a hundred years ago and probably written towards the end of the eighteenth century—is an autobiographical novel which deserves to be taken notice of. It is a classic, a minor one to be sure, in eclipse.

Supposed to be an Urdu translation of a Persian manuscript in which a young man narrates how he and a beautiful young courtesan fall in love but when the crunch comes he fails in his bid to escape with her, a

fiasco which leads to tragedy, *Nishtar*'s genesis is rather mysterious. Nobody seems to have seen the Persian original, except Sajjad Husain Anjum, the translator. In the circumstances it can't be ruled out that the whole thing is possibly an elaborate hoax. It is very likely that Sajjad Husain himself made up the story and referred to the Persian manuscript only to lend his fiction authenticity. The problem will remain unresolved unless the Persian manuscript turns up somewhere. Another way to solve it would be to have a look at Sajjad Husain's other writing. He produced at least three more works of fiction which are no longer available. Once again we run into a dead end.

The story in *Nishtar* proceeds *lentissime* as if the main characters (or at least the lovers) have all the time in the world. The tempo, in a way, suits the times in which the action takes place. It is the fog-end of the eighteenth century. The scene is western U.P., but it could be any place. There are no wide, open spaces here, no backdrop, no identifiable landmarks. It is cloistered, stagy, and heavily conversational.

Hasan Shah, the hero, is employed as an accountant-cum-manager by a British quartermaster. The Englishman, a rakish sort of person, not averse to having native mistresses, often engages courtesans in order to have his fill of fun and sex. In one of the groups of entertainers hired by him is a very attractive young woman. Hasan Shah falls in love with her and is delighted to see his passion acknowledged with equal ardor. The lovers have to be very circumspect because affairs of the heart are usually frowned upon by the senior members of such groups. The young girls are their main money-makers and to lose them, through marriage or elopement, is tantamount to bankruptcy.

The romance has a strange furtive air, as if it were taking place between two prisoners. Things slowly but inexorably drift toward disaster. The quartermaster is recalled to Calcutta and the group to which the girl belongs prepares to move again in search of some other patron. At this stage, Hasan Shah could have run away with the girl, damning the consequences. But he dithers and muffs his chances. He never sees his beloved again and she, quite rightly feeling that she has been betrayed, dies of a broken heart.

Most remarkable in *Nishtar* is the portrayal of a hero who is adept at self-deception. His love for the girl allows him to indulge in self-pity to his heart's content. He is primarily narcissistic, in love only with his own emotions and feelings. For him at least, though not for the girl, the whole thing is like a subtle game, full of romantic yearnings and exquisite little tortures, in which delightful wordy duels, charges and counter-charges,

love letters stealthily exchanged, meetings covertly arranged, happy deceptions, meaningful glances and utterances, fits of weeping and real or feigned indispositions, mesh together to form a pattern of highly satisfying *amour propre*.

Although a refined person, Hasan Shah is weak-willed, and when the real test comes and the game is on the verge of becoming something earnest and demanding, his courage deserts him. He is supposed to set off to rescue the girl. Instead he just marks time and his reasons for doing so are feeble and ridiculous and no better than bureaucratic temporizing. No one genuinely in love can possibly behave so caddishly. Finally, when he learns of his beloved's death, he is in his element again, ready to howl and weep and tear out his hair. If tragedy springs from a serious flaw in a person's character, Hasan Shah can even be invested with a tragic halo. But the tragic figure here is clearly the girl whose dream of a better and respectable life comes to naught because of her lover's vacillations.

There is something strikingly modern about Hasan Shah. It would be more to the point to say that the skill with which his warped personality has been depicted belongs distinctly to our times rather than to the preceding century. *Nūtar* has no counterpoint in the Urdu fiction of the nineteenth century. Its characters are often stereotypes or caricatures. Hasan Shah, on the other hand, is a well-rounded character, not particularly endearing it is true, but completely understandable as a human being and psychologically convincing. If the book is in fact a translation of something written two hundred years ago there is certainly cause for more astonishment.

Why has no one ever thought of making it into a movie or a teleplay? All the good old ingredients which ensure box-office success are here. You can cram in as many songs and dances as you like. There is romantic love, sentimentality and refinement. The costumes can be eye-catching. And to cap it all, such a sad ending! A real tear-jerker. What is more, it would be so easy to vulgarize it.

Nūtar was published by Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, Lahore, in 1963 and the first edition is still available for a song.¹ Some classics are very hard to sell!



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The journal of global literature.

Dear Editors:

I FULLY ENJOYED Ralph Russell's zealous arguments on "How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature" (*AUS* #6). Much of what he states is to the point, but he puffs up the matter by imputing to Messrs Saksena, Bailey, and Sadiq a "childish desire to show off" (p. 5) their knowledge of English and world literature or "the constant pointing of contrasts between Urdu literature and English—always to the detriment of Urdu" (p. 2). It is not *always* so, though comparisons can (and often did) reasonably lead to such an effect.

The main reason for the way these historians of Urdu literature wrote their histories was not their attitude, as Russell implies, to Urdu; but rather (1) the general intellectual and literary milieu and (2) their individual training as scholars and historians of literature were responsible for their methods.

They were English-oriented critics with a deep interest and insight into Urdu literature, and they shared in the first half of this century the two worlds of the East and the West in a way which has become rare, if not extinct, in the latter half of twentieth century—an irony, as also perhaps a consequence, of the age of communication. Their medium was English, and their scholarly training drew more on the European tradition than any other. Comparisons to European literature, as such, came easy, were not forced (to them), and were part of the mental and cultural frame of the time.

As there was so little proper history-writing concerning Urdu literature otherwise, they were the cosmopolitan pioneers, exploring and defining the field, and less assertive of the latter-day forms of indigenization and local pride; even so, given the general colonial context of their scholarly work, to a certain extent, the Indian-European comparisons may have been the critical modalities of self-definition, cultural authenticity, and value (rather than for the detriment of Urdu). They looked outward, from the inside. Elsewhere, too, such broad perspectives have had their parallels. Eighteenth-century English critics and dramatists had looked to,

emulated, and bettered the French. Until recently, histories of American literature nearly always sought comparisons with their British and European counterparts and ancestors. And the Australian "cultural cringe" still makes Australian critics and writers look out for what is happening in Europe, America, and Asia. (In fact, the Australians have just realized that they have a "cultural cringe.") A healthy thing altogether; for the stark opposite is redneck chauvinism of the sons of the soil. "Saksena, Sadiq, and Co." (p. 5), however, were very positive critics within the culture that produced them, and which they helped form, and expressed, in their critical discourse; a culture which can disappear easily in more egocentric times. Sadiq, particularly, was unique in having held both the Chairs of Urdu and English at the government college, Lahore, my own *alma mater*. His and his "Co.'s" achievement, in its particular qualities and as an eloquent expression of the period, cannot be taken lightly by any scholar of Urdu literature. Theirs may not be perfect, but the outline example Russell offers of how it should be is like holding half a candle to the sun.

—ALAMGIR HASHMI

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ. *The True Subject*. Translated by NAOMI LAZARD. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988. xviii, 136 pp.

———. *The Rebel's Silhouette*. Translated by AGHA SHAHID ALI. Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith, 1991. 101 pp.

AGHA SHAHID ALI SAYS WELL in his introduction: "To have to introduce him is frustrating because he should already be familiar . . ." He acknowledges that the biggest obstacle for the English reader may be Faiz's role as a political commentator: "a non-subcontinental audience . . . may begin to understand his stature as a poet *and* public figure by imagining a combination of Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, Octavio Paz, and the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish." And even if the name is familiar to many of us, Faiz is one of those poets whose name has travelled farther than the poetry. The appearance of these two collections of his poems, both with the Urdu text on the facing pages, is indeed good news.

Some elements of Faiz's poetry are eminently available without an insider's knowledge: in a prison poem which Naomi Lazard translates as "My Visitors" we hear of evening, midnight, morning and noon as visitors to his cell. It is clear that the prison cell cannot shut out everything.

But the heart and the eye are impervious
to who comes, and when, or who leaves.
They are far away, galloping home.

Whatever Urdu music was lost, the point of the poem has survived in English through the powerful figure of thought which juxtaposes the two balanced ideas: the catalogue of intangibles creeping into the cell and the contrary motion of the imagination sneaking out, figures which shelter a delicate nostalgia between them.

There are poems in which the formal effects present a greater challenge for the translator, and we don't need to know Urdu to glimpse them. Just piecing together loan words in the Urdu facing texts and

following the rhyme schemes down the page, the reader used to Persian or Arabic can see *ghazal* or *maqam* forms underneath. Even in English you can watch the restricted lexicon of *ghazal* themes mysteriously reweoven to let through a list of harsher reveries.

Is one of the translations better news than the other? It is clear that they have defined their tasks differently. Agha Shahid Ali's observation about the *ghazal* is characteristic: "Because translating a *ghazal* is just about impossible, I have adopted loose, free verse stanzas to suggest the elliptical complexities and power of Faiz's couplets." He designs forms which display the component parts of the poems and leaves us with an implicit demand to read sympathetically. This has the advantage that the particulars show through, as in those traditional verses in which he allows the cloven Urdu *kair* to break into its four or five semantic lobes—one English line each—letting indentation and stanza shape the two-part pattern. In contrast, Naomi Lazard tends to personalize. When, for instance, she says of one translation, "I need to make each image specific and to heighten the diction in order to make the poem dramatic in English," the reader senses an utterly different translator's aesthetic. Her translations tend to emphasize the individual and introspective. "Evening," a poem (in couplets) which pursues Faiz's characteristic theme that time has stopped passing, opens in Lazard's version with a meditative rhythm that makes the trees seem evocations of a mood:

Every tree is an ancient, dark, deserted
temple
whose walls are split open, the roof
caving in.

The lines end according to the logic of a reformed English line and the verse curves around for an interior state. For Ali the trees are more nearly self-contained actors:

The trees are dark ruins of temples,
seeking excuses to crumble
since who knows when—
their roofs are cracked . . .

And when the theme of time emerges, again, Lazard makes it seem a private emotion:

Night will not deepen, daybreak will
never come.

The sky longs for the spell to break,
for the chain of silence to snap . . .

We feel that the sky's longing is simply an image of the poet's, whereas Ali brings the political dimension into the foreground:

Now darkness will never come—
And there will never be morning.

The sky waits for the spell to be broken,
for History to tear itself from this net . . .

The word Ali has rendered as *History* with a capital *H* is simply *waqt* (not Arabic *dahr* with its implications of fate, not *tarikh* with its overtones of intellectual history), a relatively neutral term which needs context to make it political. Ali has given the poem a nudge which is justified the moment we see how many of Faiz's poems of waiting (Faiz's recurring theme, appropriate to a writer of prison poems with an urgency that goes beyond that of traditional erotic poetry) take their elegance from a comparable turn. The characteristic brilliance which emerges from these translations is Faiz's exquisite dialogue with his literary past—whether he is reworking famous lines from the poetry of Iqbal, or reframing tradition in broad strokes, so that the alienated lover of tradition, haunted by ecstatic visions of reconciliation in a landscape of hopelessness, finds himself in a political context. Flowers, wine, the moon: all the stage setting winds up mysteriously transformed by that deepening of context.

If we take into account Victor Kiernan's *Poems by Faiz* (Oxford, 1973), which includes not only sensitive verse translations but literal versions and transcriptions in Roman script, in addition to the facing Urdu text, as well as his marvelously detailed, personal introduction, the English and American readers now have a considerable body of Faiz texts at hand. Lazard's versions seem more nearly self-contained English poems; dimensions of the original survive in Ali's which draw us, seductively, into the cultural context. Together with Kiernan's they fit together to constitute a single piece of good news.

—MICHAEL BEARD
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SHAMSUR RAHMAN FARUQI. *Še'r-e Šer-angiz: Ġazaliyāt-e Mir kā intizāb aur Muḥaḥḥal Muḥallī's*. New Delhi: Taraqqī-e Urdū Bureau. Vol. 1 (*radīf alif tak*, 1990). 713 pp. Rs. 64/-. Vol. 2 (*radīf ḥē ā ī mīm*, 1991). 517 pp. Rs. 64/-. [Vols. 3 and 4 are forthcoming soon.]

VOLUME 1 of this new *intizāb* (selection) and *tarḥ* (expositional commentary) of the poetry of Mir is introduced by passages from Todorov, Ṭabāḡaḥā'ī, Tomashevsky, Anantlal Gangopadhyay, Siḥr Badāyūnī, Culler, Derrida, Aḥraf 'Alī Ṭḥāwī, Mallarmé, Bédil and Coleridge. Under this eclectic array of banners, the first words of the introduction set forth the purpose of the volume:

1. An exemplary *intizāb* of the *ġazal* of Mir which can be set without hesitation beside the best poetry of the world, and which will also be a representative *intizāb* of Mir.
2. Recovery of the poetics of the classical *ġazal*, by means of the classical *ġazal* poets, especially Mir.
3. Analysis, commentary, interpretation, and judgement about Mir's poetry, in the light of eastern and western poetics.
4. Consideration of Mir's place from the viewpoint of classical Urdu *ġazal* and Persian *ġazal*—especially the "ṣabk-e Hindī."
5. Discussion of necessary points about Mir's language (1:15).

A two-hundred-page introduction then proceeds to cover some of the ground laid out in points 2 through 5. It is organized into topics as follows: "Is Mir or Ġalīb the 'Xudā-e suḥan'?" (1:16–41); "Ġalīb's 'Mir-ness'" (1:43–61); "Mir's language—idiom or metaphor?" (1:62–109); "The poetry of human relationships" (1:110–148); "'Īn xamīr āmad badast-e nānāḥā'" (1:149–171); "The great ocean" (1:172–188); "Mir's meter" (1:189–202); and "'Še'r-e Šer-angiz'" (1:203–216). Readers of the author's other works of literary criticism will not be surprised at the general approach taken in the introduction, but they will surely be impressed by the elegance and subtlety of the discussion.

After the introduction, the selection and expositional commentary itself then extends for about 475 pages, followed by an index of names and terms (1:700–712). The author explicates Mir's *le'ās* (couplets) not only by discussing them, but also by juxtaposing them to a remarkably diverse array of other, more or less similar couplets. Some of these latter are by classical Persian poets, some by other classical and (occasionally) modern Urdu poets, and some by Mir himself. This *tour de force* of comparison

leaves the scholarly reader wondering at the almost total absence of footnotes and citations. How good it would be to know where to find some of these superb verses! The author, however, in this as in his other works, sees himself as a critic rather than a scholar: he has drawn the verses from a variety of sources over his years of reading, study, and personal note-taking, and is confident of their general accuracy. In view of the richness and depth of the material he has given us, it would be churlish to demand more.

In short, the work effectively accomplishes its stated purposes—and other purposes as well. I know I am not the only reader to have learned more about classical Urdu criticism and poetry from these two volumes than from almost any other work I've ever read. For Mir is one of the two great pillars of our poetic tradition; yet he has been, alas, not only much less studied than Ghalib, but also much maligned in our criticism. For Mir, as Faruqi irrefutably shows, is far from the naïve, sentimental, lachrymose poet of pathetic emotion whom he is all too often taken to be. In the beginning of the introduction to Volume 1, Faruqi makes an amply justified claim: that after reading Volume 1, it is *not* possible to say that Mir's is "the poetry of despair and disappointment, the bitterness of failure, pain and grief and sorrow," or that it is devoid of "worldly pleasure, wit, repartee, human relationships on an everyday level" [1:37]. As Asif Aslam Farrukhi puts it in his own review, to the reader of *Śer-e Śar-ang* Mir becomes an entirely new presence: "If I were asked to name the newest poet on the literary scene today, the poet who has given me such a sense of discovery, then I would say, Mir Taqi Mir" (*The News International* [Karachi], Sept. 24, 1991).

The riches of this work are so numerous and complex that it is hard even to select which of them to present in a brief review. To illustrate some of its delights, I will translate in full the discussion of one of my own favorite verses from Volume 1:

āvaragān-e 'ilq k̄ā pū'ā jā main nīlān
mult-e gubār le k̄e jabā ne nā dīā
 When I asked for a sign of the wan-
 derers of passion,
 the breeze took up a handful of dust
 and flung it into the air.

Jur'at too has used this theme (*magmān*), in this rhyme-scheme (*qāfiya*), to some extent:

kyā dushman tū tujh kō jabā us galī se jō

akṣar mirā ḡubār bā'ī tā nē urā diyā

What enmity did you feel for me, oh

breeze, that from that lane

you often carried even my dust away in
the air?

But in Mir's verse, the whole world is different. Mir has used the breeze's raking up a handful of dust and dispersing it in the air in one other place as well:

intihā lauq kī dil kē jō jabā se pūc'ī

ik haf-e xāk kō le un nē partān kiya

(Dīvān-e Suvvum)

When I asked the breeze about the limits
of the heart's passion

it took up a handful of dust and
disturbed it.

Here the theme is different, and the breeze's explanation is only artificial. By contrast, in the verse under discussion the explanation is meaningful, because it is appropriate to ask the breeze, who wanders through street after street, about the traces of the wanderers of passion. In Jur'at's verse, the theme has only one aspect: that the breeze feels something like enmity for the wanderers of passion, such that it doesn't let even their dust rest in peace. In Mir's case, there are a number of aspects in addition to this. (1) The wanderers of passion end up as merely a handful of dust. (2) The wanderers of passion are nameless and trace-less in the same way that a handful of dust is nameless and trace-less. (3) The real essence of the wanderers of passion is merely a handful of dust. In the wide and great workshop of creation, they have no status whatsoever. (4) The wanderers of passion wander as does a handful of dust; they find no rest anywhere. (5) The breeze knows nothing about the wanderers of passion ("xāk xabar hai," that is, "I know nothing at all"). (6) The breeze has no interest in what has become of the wanderers of passion—it goes around kicking up dust. (7) When I asked about the trace of the wanderers of passion, the breeze blew dust into my face, as if to say, "Who are you to ask about them?" (8) The breeze

is so grief-stricken that it flings dust on its head. (5) The inquiry might not have been addressed to the breeze. It's possible that the question was asked of someone else, or the speaker asked himself. "Where have the wanderers of passion gone, or what has happened to them?" No answer came from any other quarter; but the breeze picked up a handful of dust and gave a reply. This is hardly a verse—it's a carved, faceted jewel [1:457-458].

Sir-e-Sar-angiz is a worthy setting for this and innumerable other jewels. We owe the jewels to Mir, and the setting to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi. This is a book we have needed for a long time, to help correct and enhance our perspective on the classical *ghazal*. Readers of Volumes 1 and 2 will eagerly await the publication of Volumes 3 and 4.

FRANCES W. PRITCHETT
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ABDULLAH HUSSEIN. *Downfall by Degrees and Other Stories*. Edited and translated from the Urdu by MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1987. 197 pp. \$11.95.

THE RELATION OF TIME, events, and human life; the burden of the past; the agony of exile and alienation; and the role of the writer are some of the themes explored in this collection of five rich and complex stories. The characters cross the span of Pakistani society at home and abroad, ranging from educated urban intellectuals to working-class villagers. The style ranges from mostly dialogue in "The Rose" to largely description in "The Journey Back," and the author often provides an epigraph or opening statement that suggests a point of view from which to approach the story. This practice has its own ironies, to which I will return later. Often the significance of these openings is not clear until the end of the story, as, for example, the "More?" the woman asked" at the beginning of the first story. More of what? we want to know. Tea, of course, in the immediate situation, but more understanding of the inner dynamics of their relationship is what the two characters need in the end. In a sense, this "More?" could also stand as an epigraph for the whole collection of stories.

"The Rose" introduces us to the major theme of alienation, as we

are given contrasting views of a relationship by the man and woman involved. The ambiguity of fulfilled desire here hints at parallels to come in other stories. "The Exile" opens with a quote from Stephen Crane which suggests that while we can view with detachment the hell of others' exile, actually we are all in the same hell together. In this story is another recurring theme, namely, the burden of unresolved questions from the past. At the end of the story when the narrator sees an old exile, he experiences a profound sense of relief as he understands the longings of the alienated chief clerk of an office in which he had worked many years before.

An unresolved question from the past forms the basis of "The Refugees," which opens with a short meditation on time, events, and human life. The ironic situation of the writer is introduced here with the explicit mention of "this story." The story involves a father, his son Aftab, and Aftab's own son. The parallel situations in the lives of Aftab and his father lead to opposite results as each tries to understand a life-changing moment in his own past. The father is driven to suicide when he realizes that his supreme moment of happiness can never be recaptured; Aftab realizes that it is memory itself that gives meaning to life by uniting the past and the present. As present and past come together and Aftab understands that he can indeed go back to his own city, the meaning of this exile's return is ambiguous and not entirely satisfying. "Something was found, but something was lost too; something was revealed, but something had also become forever hidden" (p. 61).

Irony is the mode of the title story. It ostensibly concerns the life of Ayaz, a brilliant lawyer who abandons his rigid standards of rationality for intuition. It is equally about the narrator, an old friend of Ayaz and a writer of some success, who abandons his career as a writer and begins writing only in his diary. The murder case that changes their lives seems of minor importance in Ayaz's career, but when the parallels in the lives of the murderer and the lawyer start to become apparent, and the narrator's story-within-a-story begins, the ironies reach the foreground. Through the diverging viewpoints of the narrator and Ayaz, Abdullah Hussein probes the role of the writer and the limits of writing itself. When the narrator-writer realizes that his power to control reality is really a fraud in that it operates only in his fiction, he abandons creative writing for recording events in his diary. Writing for himself alone, he thinks, will become truly a form of knowing. But Abdullah Hussein has already said in the opening paragraph of "The Refugees" that events exist only in time and are related to "the great unknowns that flank them on either side" (p.

35). In that story Afrab has to tell his story to his own son to make sense out of it, i.e., he must select and order the events in a certain way to make a narrative out of them and thus give them meaning. Writing in one's diary is also an attempt to control reality by selecting and ordering events in a narrative. But if all events are related to other events, in the end how much control does the diary-writer have? Is all writing then a fraud, or at best only an illusory way of knowing? How successful can the author's epigraphs be in attempting to control the reader's understanding of the stories?

The final story, "The Journey Back," begins enticingly enough: "From our relations with women we learn about ourselves." Narrated by a male who also participates in the events, the story is set in Britain and stresses the force of fate, the gulf between British and Pakistani culture, and the exile's longing for home. As with the other stories, the past here is a burden that the characters carry with them and sometimes it seems more real than the present. "In exile, you have no identity," says the narrator, and this seems to sum up the basic message of all the stories. With no identity, you are hollow inside, whether you are exiled from your fellows and colleagues by the alienating forces of modern society, or exiled from your country and living among foreigners. The irony in this story is that while all the characters long for their homeland, the only one able to return is sent back because of his insanity. Because he is closed in his own world and not bothered by problems of identity, he has not suffered in exile and would seem to be equally cheerful about staying or going.

The translation reads very well. There is no sense of palimpsest with the Urdu showing through the English, and the diction maintains an even quality. We should be grateful to Professor Memon for bringing us these excellent stories in such an appealing form.

—WILLIAM L. HANAWAY
University of Pennsylvania

NASEER AHMAD KHAN. *Urdu in Two Weeks*. New Delhi: Urdu Mahal Publications, 1990. 111 pp. Rs 35/-.

BEFORE I CAME ACROSS THIS ASTONISHING BOOK, I WAS NOT AWARE THAT: (1) Urdu was "derived" from *Kʿart Beli*, and precisely in the 11th century; (2) the Constitution of India "protects" sixteen "national languages;" (3)

Urdu has a "sub-standard" form called Hindustani; and (4) Urdu is the "second official language" in Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, several districts of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Delhi. (If the latter is the case, I wonder what the Urdu-*salāh* complain about.) The author also claims that the "Urdu script is one of the three most widely used scripts in the world," but he can't be certain about the exact number of the letters in the Urdu alphabet and the basic shapes he would postulate for them. On page 6, he says the alphabet has 37 letters and 20 basic shapes, but on page 82 he writes that there are 36 letters and 19 basic shapes. On page 84, he again goes back to the earlier count! He, however, is most certain about the purpose of his enterprise: "This booklet is exclusively meant for Hindi-knowing people interested in reading and writing Urdu and the Urdu speakers who may not be able to read and write their language." No wonder he wrote his book in English! The author is an associate professor in the Center of (sic) Indian Languages, JNU, and no less could have been expected of him. Unfortunately, he didn't show his manuscript to some English-knowing colleague; the result is that his English makes sense only if one is fluent in Urdu.

The author has "spread" his "program of learning" over 22 units, of which "16 units are basic and the rest are informative." (The distinction is subtle, indeed.) Let's look at Unit 1. It begins with a section entitled, "Observations and Instructions." It introduces three letters: *alif*, *lām*, *mīm*. Why the three are put together is not explained. Native speakers of Hindi are told that these letters represent sounds "as in *calm*, *look* and *moon*" respectively. Then we are told that "Alif remains the same in all position (sic)—initial, medial, final—of a word but occurs with a sign called MAD which is placed over the letter initially." Forgive me if I take that to mean that Alif always has a *madd* over it when it occurs initially. But that is absurd. For one, how does one indicate initial short vowels? The absurdities keep piling up as the author rambles through his "basic" and "informative" units, ending up with a book that is basically disinformative. His explanations of the script are confusing and often erroneous, his transliteration of Urdu words is often idiosyncratic, and his taste in sample Urdu sentences given as reading exercises is much too peculiar. I can only hope that the book doesn't fall into any student's hands.

—C. M. NAJIB
University of Chicago

ANIS NAGI. *Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Ek Muqall'ab*. Lahore: Maqbool Academy, 1991. Rs. 150/-.

ALTHOUGH ITS TITLE would suggest otherwise, the book has not been authored by Dr. Anis Nagi. In fact, it is a collection of personal and critical essays on Sa'adat Hasan Manto, written by different people at different points in time, put together by Dr. Nagi with the help of a photocopier.

As the learned Dr. has elsewhere received the thrashing he rightly deserves for unauthorized and unacknowledged use of materials produced by others, it would be pointless to dwell on this here. To me at any rate, this is merely an extension of Manto's Post-partition existence, when he was forced to let himself be exploited by greedy publishers on the one hand, and by critics with an immediate political agenda like Muhammad Hasan Askari and Mumtaz Shirin on the other.

All the material collected between the covers of the present volume has appeared earlier in literary journals and books. There is no compiler's introduction or preface to enlighten readers about the criteria, if any, used in the selection of pieces or in the format of the book. Consequently, the justification of—or indeed the need for—the seemingly formless compilation remains obscure till the very end. Further, the word *muqall'ab* in the title would also appear inaccurate, if not downright wrong, as the selected material fails to constitute a sustained critical study of Manto's work.

Not all the pieces included in the collection can be called "critical," as a good number of them are merely personal impressions or reminiscences by people not necessarily known as literary critics. Full of interesting anecdotes from Manto's quite picturesque life, the pieces, with the single exception of Bari Aliq's account of the writer's early days in Amritsar, offer hardly any insights into his creative personality.

Even most of the critical pieces in the book do little more than point—by default, of course—to the fact that a proper critical appreciation of the greatest Urdu short story writer has yet to be accomplished. After the obsolescence of the progressive and anti-progressive polemic, critics seem to have reached a near consensus that Manto was a great writer, but that's about it. Apart from stating the obvious, there has hardly been a fitting effort to analyze the characteristics of Manto's writing, its aesthetic and social significance, and, above all, Manto's legacy to the fiction that followed him. Traditional Urdu

criticism does not, to this day, seem to have sharpened its tools well enough to embark on this long-overdue undertaking. So deep-rooted is our poverty in this regard that such naïve statements as "Manto's characters are neither *na'at* nor *na'at*; they are just *zaki* human beings," or such terrible misreadings as "woman in Manto's stories is temptation personified," not only pass as authentic critical judgment but are indeed highlighted by the publishers in blubs on the back covers of authorized and unauthorized editions of Manto's works.

Among all the critics who were writing when Manto was alive, only Askari seems to have had the intellectual capacity to undertake a suitable critical study of the story writer who remains unequalled to this day. But Askari did not go beyond briefly mentioning in several of his pieces the fact that since Manto was writing at a juncture when the Urdu language did not have a fully developed prose, let alone a rich tradition of fiction, he had to start from scratch. But in all fairness to Askari, he hardly had much time for elaborating on Manto's literary merits. First of all, his acquaintance with Manto was fairly recent. Although Manto had been writing for more than a decade and had already established himself as an important fiction writer, Askari appears to have been as comfortably ignorant of his existence as was his disciple Mumtaz Shirin, until Manto landed in Lahore after Partition. Then in the initial years of Pakistan as a separate state, Askari was too busy defending the dismissal of the elected government of Dr. Khan Sahib and the imposition of Qayyum Khan's rule in ۱۹۵۳, and justifying the Public Safety Act, to care much about his function as a literary critic. Incidentally, this Act—one of the first pieces of repressive legislation in Pakistan's political history, duly adopted by our first representative assembly—had Manto as one of its first victims. Even on the literary side there were more pressing items on Askari's agenda. One has the feeling that the time he spent trying to establish his mentor, Firaq Gorakhpuri, as a great poet and critic, or, in the later years of his life, importing Islam from France, would have been better employed had he responded to the need for a critical appraisal of Manto's contribution to modern Urdu fiction.

Although Manto never claimed to be a critic himself, he had a fairly accurate idea of the limitations of Urdu literary criticism. This is perhaps why he treated the critics with positive contempt, which, considering their bankruptcy, does not seem too harsh or unjustified. The critical articles included in the volume under review do not get beyond the familiar level of Urdu criticism and add next to nothing to the reader's

appreciation of Manto's work. One of the most recognizable characteristics of Urdu literary criticism is that it has little, if anything, to do with the text it claims to analyze. This freedom from the text allows the critic to indulge in the fine art of theorizing in the air. The criticism included in the volume provides numerous examples of this art.

One remarkable exception is Ifrikhar Jalib's analysis of one of Manto's finest short stories, "Māzī," which stands out as a model of an approach entirely unknown to the regular critical writing one comes across in Urdu. Jalib has applied the same approach in a couple of his earlier pieces on Manto's individual stories, but, I must say, he has never been as successful before in his appreciation of the linguistic devices employed by Manto. He tries to read the story on the level of the personal creative usage of the language, amply substantiating his case with examples from the texts, and finally comes up with a totally new, but largely plausible interpretation. This new reading of Manto's text does not rule out, but rather complements, other, equally valid, readings of "Māzī," the most obvious of which is the political interpretation.

What is true for "Māzī" is generally true for all of Manto's successful short stories (including those that are conveniently classified as erotica) in which the content—political to the core—comes to life through excellent use of formal devices. Perhaps it is this superb formal treatment which endows Manto's stories with a layer of accessibility and makes it difficult for simple-minded readers—and even more simple-minded critics—to try to approach his texts on a deeper level. On the other hand, Manto's biting political and social commentary has proved too unbearable for our "hypocrites" who want to be able to uphold both Manto and the Public Safety Act with the same facility. The political aspect of Manto's writing, and its close relationship with the aesthetic and linguistic devices used so masterfully by him, has yet to receive the critical appreciation it deserves. Jalib's article is a step in this direction, but it is just a single step. What is needed most is a whole body of critical work, undertaken with precision and courage, in order for readers to come to grips with the most outstanding fiction writers of Urdu. This study, if and when it is undertaken, would have to analyze Manto's art in its proper perspective, together with the work of his contemporaries, and ultimately address basic questions like these: Why is that such powerful writers as Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Ismat Chughtai, and Ghulam Abbas seem to have left no heirs at all? What happened to our fiction after Manto? And what have we done to our society since 1947? Avoiding these urgent questions will lead us nowhere except to the empty, meaningless

announcements of literature's inertia and death.

—AJMAL KAMAL
Editor, *Aj*, Karachi

GOPH CHAND NARANG. *Urdu Language and Literature: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1991. 244 pp.

GOPH CHAND NARANG has been writing on Urdu literature for nearly thirty years and this book is a representative sample—"a cross-section" in the author's words—of his work. Fifteen English-language essays have been culled from his prodigious writings. The book does not serve as a kind of miniature model of Narang's work, faithfully reflecting every detail and texture; however, it does indicate some of his general concerns and methods.

As English-language essays, most were written for an audience not well-versed in Urdu literature; they were designed as introductions to topics, as overviews and surveys. A reader with some familiarity with Urdu literature is not likely to find much new or unique here. None of Narang's Urdu language essays has been translated for this collection. The basic messages of the articles are fairly commonplace and can be succinctly expressed: Urdu poetry has been greatly influenced by Sufism (chapter 1); *magnum* writers have drawn upon Indian tales and customs (chapter 4); many Urdu poets contributed to the anti-colonial movement (chapter 5); Faiz Ahmed Faiz utilized traditional poetic conventions while adding a new political content (chapter 8); Urdu short stories have moved from the period of realism and naturalism with overt political commitments to a more symbolic, metaphoric, and abstract style (chapter 10).

But even the novice might become disappointed with these essays since they fail to confront the problematics raised within the essays themselves. In general, Narang would like to provide a strictly *literal* reading of literature and to wall off the real from the "symbolic." He believes that it is perfectly possible to distinguish between a literal meaning and a metaphorical one:

When the 'signifier' is used at the surface level then there may be the relationship of one to one between the word and the meaning.

But when it is used beyond the visual to signify the super-real or the other, then the metaphor is evoked (p. 199).

Such a theory of meaning and reading is less than crude for it founds the entirety of the "real" and "concrete" upon the *visual*, upon what can be seen. Narang does not even bother to include the other four senses to make the more traditional (Humean) argument that the real is what our senses tell us and that a one-to-one correspondence exists between our sensual experience and the external world. Narang states that "in creative writing the 'signified' is simply not amenable to any definition" (p. 199), but then goes on to state that he (somehow) is able to fix the definition and to determine when the meaning has exceeded its permitted quotient of realness.

Narang not only claims to know the difference between literal and symbolic definitions of words, he also claims to precisely know the symbolic definitions. His all too brief discussion of symbol, metaphor and allegory is very confused and frequently degenerates into trivialities (allegories "have sharpened our insight and added to our pleasure"; they have "provided a creative stimulus" [p. 200]). Nevertheless, his point is that the Urdu (and Indian) tradition has been one of allegory, that Indians have had "a deep-rooted subconscious drive" for allegories (p. 202). Narang wishes to limit the metaphorical character of language by forcing it to follow the logic of the allegory and to justify such a reduction on the basis of a quasi-genetic Indian trait. He desires words to have a one-to-one correspondence with another set of other words that can be identified with equal ease.

Narang is obviously uncomfortable in probing his methodology of criticism. The above quotes are from the sole passage in the book addressing the problem of signification and this problem was forced upon him in the process of writing about the "new Urdu short story" (e.g. the work of Intizar Hussain). But we might wonder whether his methodology, if inadequate for comprehending the relentlessly metaphorical character of the "new story," is at all adequate for comprehending the "old story." Let us take his essay on the poetry of Faiz. Here Narang offers an allegorical reading, a decoding of Faiz's words. He lists eighteen common words in Faiz's poetry, gives their lexical meanings and then their allegorical equivalents within Faiz's supposed ulterior narrative of revolution. So for instance, *raqib* literally means a lover's rival, but allegorically it stands for "imperialism and capitalism" (p. 103). When Faiz is writing of gardens and wine shops he is simply providing a cover story for an underlying

narrative of the struggle for communism.

This reading clearly mistakes Faiz's poetry for some sort of secret code. As just one instance, to decipher *raḡīb* as a symbol for "imperialism and capitalism" hardly helps us understand those lines where Faiz sympathizes with the *raḡīb*. The novelty of Faiz in this case was not his use of *raḡīb* to mean capitalism, but rather his treatment of the *raḡīb* as a fellow sufferer, pained by the beloved's rejection. What that might mean in the logic of a communist narrative is unclear but one doesn't have to resort to a hidden code book to understand the idea it conveys of sympathy for those who suffer. That is not exclusively a communist idea.

Narang's allegorical reading seriously limits the metaphorical reach of Faiz. In one poem, Faiz wrote that the "true subject of poetry was the loss of the beloved." Should we infer then that his poetry is ultimately about a defeat of the revolutionary movement (cf. p. 103)? The concept of love in Faiz is hardly amenable to being reduced to either a clear allegorical or lexical meaning for it becomes part of a general human experience, open to a world of analogies, multiple correspondences, and shifting metaphors. Faiz wrote about love in subtle, complex and ambiguous ways, but Narang, who immediately desists wherever ambiguity exists, refuses to explore them. Narang's allegorical reading, moreover, can say nothing about Faiz's overtly political poems which do not seem to hide a hidden code.

Narang has recently supplemented his interpretation of Faiz in an Urdu-language essay by arguing that this political allegory in Faiz accounts for his popularity. (Cf. "Faiz kō kaisē na Paḡhān: Ēk Pas-sāzīyātī Ravāiyā" [How Not to Read Faiz: A Post-Structuralist Approach], *Sangār* 1 [new series; September 1991], pp. 303–316.) He writes that the aesthetic effect of Faiz's poetry has been heightened by people's expectation that there is a political meaning to seemingly innocent lines about gardens and wine shops. Once those expectations are taken away and Faiz is read for the "obvious meaning" (*jarīḡī m'ana*), then he is merely an average poet. Narang is halfway correct in saying that the public's knowledge of Faiz's life has helped to elevate his status, but to prioritize this idea of a political allegory in Faiz is a reductionist reading. Narang's essay itself is a prime example of the difficulties in the concept of an "obvious meaning"—a concept that is inherent in every essay in the book under review—for, in direct contradiction with its title, it presents the antithesis of a post-structuralist reading: it posits an unambiguous "obvious meaning" to poetry and then attributes any additional meaning to the ideological structure of the economic system (borrowing from Althusser). If one is

searching for a label then this perhaps would be termed "Marxist positivism."

The difficult and yet fundamental problems of literary criticism are not broached in this collection of essays. The book is divided into sections according to the divide between classical and modern Urdu. The reason for this divide and its validity are taken for granted by Narang. The essays intend to discuss only "good" literature (cf. p. 39) and yet Narang offers no explication of his aesthetic standards. The major theme of the book and Narang's entire work is the "indigenous base and syncretic qualities" of Urdu which allow it to play a "syncretizing role in a pluralistic, secular and democratic India" (p. vii). These are nice-sounding words but there is an enormous number of questions surrounding such a position which Narang does not even address. It is not at all clear that having people speak the same or a similar language will help reduce religious or political violence. If Narang wants to promote the syncretic qualities of Urdu, then one would expect him to explain how and why Urdu and Hindi came to be split in the first place. Narang is offering a cure, but what is the disease?

—JOHN ROOSA

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Pakistani Literature. Chief Editor: GHULAM RABBANI A. AGRO. Managing Editor: IFTIKHAR ARIEF. Guest Editor: MUZAFFAR IQBAL. Vol. 1, No. 1. Islamabad: Pakistan Academy of Letters, 1992. 314 pp. Rs. 100/- (\$12.00, £6.00).

THE PAKISTAN ACADEMY OF LETTERS seems to have set a mission for itself: to open up the domain of what it refers to as "Pakistani literature" to English-speaking audiences both inside and outside the South Asian Subcontinent by producing volumes of translations. Not too long before the appearance of the present journal, the distinguished Academy had already published *Selected Short Stories from Pakistan: Urdu*, and stated there in a publisher's note that the next volume in the series would comprise translations of short fiction in Panjabi, Pashto, Balochi, and Sindhi. While we still await this promised volume, the first issue of *Pakistani Literature* includes translations from all of these languages, demonstrating the Academy's resolve to display to the English-speaking

world Pakistan's literary wares.

The journal itself is attractive: 15 x 24cm., sturdy paper, glossy section dividers, clear typeface, and virtually no typographical errors. The various sections are laid out according to original language: Urdu first (and foremost—130 of 214 total pages), followed in order by Panjabi (10 pages, all poems by Bulleh Shah), Pashto (14 pages), Sindhi (16 pages), Balochi (12 pages), and English (6 pages). Several authors are admirably introduced with concise biographic sketches, and all contributors are at least mentioned in the notes at the end of the journal. There is also a brief editorial by Iftikhar Arif, a short piece tantalizingly entitled "Raison d'être" by Muzaffar Iqbal (more on this later), and a long essay on Abdullah Husein, also by Muzaffar Iqbal. In all, this first issue of *Pakistani Literature* is a nicely balanced production. The English of the translations is never worse than readable, usually quite good, and in several cases (especially Shelagh S. Bharti's rendering of Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi's "A Lament" and Faruq Hassan and M. Salim-ur-Rahman's translations of Majeed Amjad's poems) nothing short of wonderful.

So, concerning the translations themselves, this reviewer has no major objections. This is not the case, however, when it comes to many of the fundamental editorial decisions that must have preceded the appearance of this journal in the first place. For instance, what exactly is "Pakistani literature?" What makes it *Pakistani* and not, say, "northern South Asian?" Is literature (*a* literature, *any* literature, *all* literature?) to be categorized in terms of the political state that lays claim to the geographic birthsites of its authors? How, for instance, can the Academy claim Bulleh Shah as a producer of "Pakistani literature" when his birth in the Panjab predates the existence of Pakistan by well over two centuries? When we turn to Muzaffar Iqbal's "Raison d'être" we find the only passage in the entire journal that even approximates a response to this consideration:

Unlike the literature of many European countries, Pakistani literature preceded the emergence of the state by many centuries. Its early development took place in a highly cosmopolitan atmosphere which had emerged after the arrival of the Muslims in the subcontinent. The interaction of Islamic civilization with the local traditions gave birth to a unique synthesis of historic importance; Pakistani literature is the product of this organic development. [...]

This historical development is unique in many respects and can only be understood in its proper context. Its uniqueness stems from

the fact that the literary heritage of Pakistani people is not necessarily defined by the geographical boundaries of the present day Pakistan. Instead, like the ideological basis of the state, it reaches out to its ancestral roots for its nourishment and growth.

If "Pakistani literature" does indeed "precede the emergence of the state by many centuries" (a questionable claim at best, simply untenable at worst), and if it is the case that "the literary heritage of Pakistani people is not necessarily defined by the geographical boundaries of the present day Pakistan," then the question "What is Pakistani about 'Pakistani literature'?" is not thereby answered, it is *begged*. One question then becomes two: (1) What *is* the ideological entity "Pakistan" that precedes the emergence of the state "Pakistan"? (2) How does such an ideological entity substantiate a comparative literary category? As asserted by Mr. Iqbal, political statehood and its attendant geography are not to be the criteria for inclusion in the literary category "Pakistani," and this rationale allows the inclusion of Bulleh Shah. But apparently, neither is the Urdu language itself a sufficient criterion, even though it is precisely one of those Islamic/indigenous "developments" cited by Mr. Iqbal in the historical prefiguration of "Pakistani" literature. Were it a sufficient criterion, the editors might have seen fit to include someone like Qurratulain Hyder, an acknowledged master of Urdu prose, who just happens to live in India. Given the logic Mr. Iqbal's discussion of "Pakistani" literature, we thus have one rather predictable inclusion, and a very questionable exclusion. Obviously, literary taxonomy is tenuous business, and to base the existence of an entire journal on the promulgation of an inadequately conceived "Pakistani" literature is even more tenuous. Rather than propound inflated and ultimately vacuous claims regarding what amounts to the cultural—indeed, the ontological—bases of a regional literature, the editors at *Pakistani Literature* would have done much better simply to have selected some more concrete limiting criteria and stuck to them, warts and all. In essence, grand claims like those made by Mr. Iqbal in "Raison d'être" function as little more than capricious and *ex post facto* aggrandizements of a political state that seeks to include a literary tradition among its cultural assets simply by saying that it is so. Frankly, one is forced to wonder just how autonomous the Pakistan Academy of Letters is from the official Ministry of Education that established its chatter.

The second objection this reviewer has pertains specifically to the Urdu works selected for this first issue of the journal. Why, so soon after

the publication of *Selected Short Stories from Pakistan: Urdu*, which includes many works by the "first generation" of Pakistani Urdu writers, did the editors of *Pakistani Literature* see fit to include so many more works by this same generation? One can perhaps understand this logic if one supposes that the primary concern of the editors was to introduce new audiences to the established canon of Urdu literature—Iqbal, Faiz, Manto, Ghulam Abbas, Inrizar Husain, Meeta Ji, etc. Clearly, there is sense in this, for several of these, being poets, could not be included in *Selected Short Stories*. All of the prose fiction writers, however, did appear in *Selected Short Stories*. Would not an even greater service have been done by including some of the younger and more experimental prose writers Pakistan has to offer? We await the second issue of *Pakistani Literature* to see what kinds of editorial decisions are made there.

—G.A. CHAUSSEÉ

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The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastān of Amr Hamzah. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by FRANCES W. PRITCHETT. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. xii, 172 pp. Illustrations. \$35.00.

THE INDO-MUSLIM *dastān* tradition was one of the most widespread and enthusiastically received genres of popular literature in the Subcontinent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Originating in Persia, *dastāns* probably went to India with the Muslim conquerors led by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. They were popular in the Mughal courts and in the Deccan, and no doubt among the common people too, although we have records only of written, courtly literature. *Dastāns* were written and told in Persian until the decline of that language in India in the nineteenth century, and they existed in Urdu at least from the late eighteenth century in Deccan. In North India they appear in print at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and as printing spread, so did their mass appeal. What are these tales that had such a long life and warm reception among the elite and commoners alike?

Dastāns are generically romances and share a number of characteristics with the Western romance tradition. Their heroes are human beings who are sometimes larger than life. Magic is a central part

of the Persian and later the Indo-Muslim romances. Some, such as the romance of Alexander the Great and that of Hamzah, may have a tenuous connection with the life of a historical character, but for the most part the heroes are fictional. Generally they tell of the maturing of a hero from callow youth to responsible adult ready to assume the duties of marriage and public life. As the hero experiences challenges that help him mature, he is often shown to embody some of the social or moral ideals of his class, and thus romances have a didactic purpose. Generic boundaries are never firmly fixed, however, and each new member modifies to some degree the limits and shape of its genre. The romance of Hamzah is no exception, and the late versions of it extend generic borders considerably.

In formal terms, *dastāns* are extended, episodic tales, in prose or verse. Their written form derives directly from their oral form, and even newly created tales that have no oral ancestors follow the generic conventions. This means that for *dastāns* that exist in both oral and written forms, there is no single, authoritative version. They exist both in performance and in whatever written versions we have. This fluidity is well demonstrated by the printing history of the Hamzah romance in Urdu. *Dastāns* have a main plot and may have elaborate subplots weaving in and out. The action is fast-paced and tends to focus on what excites people most: fighting and erotic adventures. The texture of the prose is simple and straightforward except at predictable points (e.g., conventional opening phrases, descriptions, descriptions of beautiful women or the armor of heroes) when it becomes very elaborate with lengthy *isṭifāʿ*-compounds, learned vocabulary and allusions, inserted verses, images from high literature, and the like. Some of these sections will be almost set-pieces, and this suggests another prominent characteristic of this style, repetition. Repetition appears on various levels, from epithets and descriptive phrases to set-piece descriptions such as the *sarāpa* (head-to-toe description of a beauty), and repeated scenes such as single combats and battles.

The characters of *dastāns* show little introspection or psychological development, and are often types that reflect certain moral values. This is not to say that they lack individuality or that they are not memorable, but only that we know them much more through their actions than through their thoughts. Socially the characters are kings and queens, princes and princesses, *ʿayyār*, wizards and sorcerers, *paris* and jinns. There is much interaction, often sexual, between humans and supernatural beings.

The action takes place within the known world and in the supernatural world as well. This is in keeping with the requirements of

the genre of these tales, where the hero must spend some time outside the human world as part of his maturation.

The various written versions of the *dastan* of Amir Hamzah fit well into this generic description. The most popular version has proven to be that written by Abdullah Bilgrami and first printed in Lucknow in 1871 by Naval Kishor. This version has been reprinted many times thereafter, and Professor Pritchett uses the eleventh edition of 1969 for her abridged translation of about one-fourth of the Urdu text. Through a judicious selection of passages to render into English, and some thoughtful editorial decisions regarding the translation of personal names, paragraph divisions, punctuation, section headings, and summaries of untranslated parts, she has managed to convey an excellent sense of the liveliness and color of the original. Professor Pritchett has chosen representative kinds of scenes and incidents to translate, and thus has avoided repetitiousness and at the same time has preserved the continuity of the story. Many of the characters have meaningful names, and she has succeeded very well in rendering some of these. "Hell-cave Bano," for Saqar Ghar Bano is particularly felicitous.

Professor Pritchett has provided an extensive introduction which discusses the *dastan* tradition in Persia and the Subcontinent, the evolution of the tale of Hamzah, and the history of the printed versions of it. The book is attractively produced, containing many illustrations from the 1871 Naval Kishor edition including the beautiful title page. It is a pity that the most charming picture of all, that of Hamzah and Amar Ayyar, appears only on the dust jacket.

Histories of Urdu literature, like those of Persian and Arabic literature, have tended to focus on the high, courtly literature and to ignore popular literature, both oral and written. Printed *dastans*, like much of the literature that appears in chapbooks, represent literature that appealed (and in many cases still does) to the majority of the population. This popular literature, as Professor Pritchett makes clear, interacts with high literature and each influences the other. For this reason alone, *dastans* and other sorts of popular literature should constitute an important part of future literary histories of Urdu, Persian, and other languages of the area. By publishing this translation and its excellent introduction, and through her earlier research on South Asian popular literature, Professor Pritchett has drawn attention to this unfortunately neglected part of South Asian culture. In clarifying its place in the larger literary spectrum she has helped to illuminate the high literature as well as the popular. It seems time now for literary scholars to take more account of these stories

which enjoyed such a wide circulation and close attention among the people of the Subcontinent.

—WILLIAM L. HANAWAY
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Urdu Letters of Mirza Asadu'llah Khan Ghalib. Translated and annotated by DAUD RAHBAR. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987. xlv, 628 pp. \$48.50.

Why don't you write me letters independently? It is as simple as this: write the letter and have your man take it to the post office. Send it *postage-paid* or *herang*. You don't have to write the address in such detail as to include the location of my lodging. The post office is near my house, and the postmaster is an acquaintance of mine. (Letter 110: Ghalib to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan, February 3, 1860; p. 193)

MIRZA ASADU'LLAH KHAN GHALIB was the greatest Muslim poet of the nineteenth century who enjoyed much patronage at the *fin de siècle* Mughal Court, and then fought prolonged official battles with their British successors over his lapsing pension. Although he wrote a great deal in Persian, which is important in its own right, he is considered to be the greatest Urdu poet of the nineteenth century; and, incidentally, by virtue of his Urdu letters written during the last twenty years of his life, he also became the father of modern Urdu prose. Letter-writing was then helped by the Indian version of the Victorian penny-postage and, certainly, the general cultivation of a very high level of conversation, thanks to the absence of the telephone. All correspondence, however, was not of a kind; and Ghalib's letters are unique. Wit, intellectual substance, a certain informal decorum coupled with a portly courtliness, and a sprightly conversational style set them apart as a model of Urdu prose, the like of which could not be produced even in writing factories like the Fort William College (c. 1800).

Although Ghalib was much distressed by the destruction of Delhi in his time, an objective detachment was the other side of his deep love for the city and its culture. Thus to Nawab Anwarud Daula Shafiq:

Let me tell you of an established rule of thumb about Dilli, namely, that the Power of the Creator has made it so that any human being, male or female, born within the walls of this city is automatically endowed with a nature tending towards hysteria and hypochondria. . . . (Letter 106, p. 188)

How much he appreciated a warm, responsive and directly communicative correspondence—transcribing life almost to the extent of substituting it—is easily seen from what he wrote to Mir Ghulam Baba Khan on April 3, 1967:

. . . Your affectionate letter which came earlier was a reply to one of mine, so a reply to it was not written. The day before yesterday, a letter from Miyan Saiful Haq arrived. More a feast-platter than a letter! From it I helped myself to delicious viands, delicacies, and fruits, and through it saw a dance-show and heard songs. . . . (Letter 133)

After all, the letter is not television, but such pleasure in correspondence would require an accomplished and well-orchestrated mode of communication. The Urdu letter had developed into that mode by the time Muslim civilization itself had declined in India, and official correspondence was being conducted increasingly in English. Ghalib signified, in every sense, that break with the official culture of British India.

Daud Rahbar has chosen about half of the letters in Maulana Ghulam Rasul Mihr's Urdu edition and, assisted by an American linguist and a word-processor, rendered them into a most readable English translation which manages to convey both Ghalib's genius and his unmistakable voice. The 170 letters, sent to various people at various times, discuss and reflect the many engagements, affairs, issues and moods which the master poet conveyed movingly, and with so much ease, in his prose; so that they also "afford the Western reader hitherto unfamiliar with Ghalib's substantial contribution to world literature a broad view of the artist as poet, master of prose, linguist, teacher, historian and friend" (Introduction, p. xlv). Even Ghalib's Shi'ite interests are noted by the translator in the introductory pages. The selection is made with care generally. Letters 53, 63, and 97 provide interesting, if contrastive, comments by Ghalib himself on his letter-writing style. Several others discuss Urdu and Persian as languages, as well as their literary traditions;

or mangoes. The long shadow of the Mutiny of 1857 and its aftermath overhangs the text of many. Ghalib frequently inscribed his Urdu poems and Persian verses in the letters. These also have been reproduced as part of the text in Rahbar's own calligraphic hand and faithfully—if somewhat literally—translated.

While the letters reveal the many aspects of Ghalib's personality, and something of those to whom he wrote, the arrangement by addressee, though chronological within the respective addresses, sheds more light on relationships as such than on the general milieu, and cannot really suggest the actual line of Ghalib's own development of thought from day to day. For the latter, a general chronological ordering of his letters, by the year rather than the addressee, may have been more to the point. But that was not the translator-compiler's intention: rather, it is Ghalib's "circle" which has been the ordering principle, so that Letter 133 (to Nawab Mir Ghulam Baba Khan) of April 3, 1867, quoted above, is followed a few pages down by Letter 139 (to Miyan Dad Khan Sayyah) of July 31, 1860. Thus the earlier selection in *Ghalib: Life and Letters* (by Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, 1969) will remain useful, though it is superseded by the present volume in that, instead of preparing appropriate excerpts as in the 1969 volume, full text of the selected letters has been given.

Scholarly annotation is abundant and helpful particularly to the Western reader; more than half the book (pp. 308–628) consists of notes. The system of transliteration used is explained (pp. xliv–xlv). But the main regret is that the publishers have not matched the effort of the book in terms of production and just reproduced the typewritten copy. Annemarie Schimmel's remarks about Ghalib in her Foreword are appropriate, although her breathless style (see pp. xii–xiii) has certain meaningless locutions: "In him [Rahbar] we have a scholar who has lived outside Pakistan for many years . . ." (p. xiv). That, I suppose, will be the least mentionable of a translator's qualities or qualifications, i.e. to approach Ghalib and ask him if he would please speak to us in English. Rahbar, of course, is prudent in referring to his childhood "privilege of being in the company of many elders" whose "style of conversation echoed Ghalib's culture" (Preface), which authenticates the translator's familiarity—besides the bases of an academic dealing—with his material. On seeing the work that follows, one is sure that Ghalib's English audience will no longer complain of being underprivileged.

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Hasan Shah's The Nautch Girl: A Novel. Translated, and with an Introduction by QURBATULAIN HYDER. New Delhi: Sterling Paperbacks, 1992. 104 pp. Rs. 45/-

THE NAUTCH GIRL is a fascinating piece of South Asian literature, but not for the reasons one might perhaps at first suppose. It is not, for instance, a very good story. In the mechanical terms of plot, character, and narrative, *The Nautch Girl* is for contemporary readers unexceptional. The plot is utterly simple: man loves woman in socially impossible circumstances, they marry in secret, they carry out their relationship from a distance, the marriage remains unconsummated, she ultimately dies, and the reader is left with the impression that the man lives out the rest of his life hardened and unfulfilled. The characters are only slightly more interesting. The man is the author Hasan Shah himself, an overworked *mumtaz* in the employ of Ming Sahib (the translator—Qurratulain Hyder—speculates that this name is a local corruption of 'Manning Sahib'), a British official living the good life of expatriot wealth in late eighteenth century Kanpur, a burgeoning city steeped in the high Mughal culture of Oudh. The object of Hasan Shah's desires is Khanum Jan, the "nautch girl" of the title. (The original Persian title is *Nakhar*, "the surgeon's knife," which, according to Ms. Hyder, is a conventional metaphor for the cutting pain of separation from one's beloved.) Khanum Jan is certainly the most robustly wrought character of the novel: predictably beautiful, but with a wit and sophisticated worldly wisdom that both belies her youth and leaves the narrating Hasan Shah seeming in comparison like something of a boob. The narrative itself is strictly linear and involves very little authorial reflection, leaving external event and recounted dialogue to order the text. In the most basic technical sense, *The Nautch Girl* is an example of the novel genre *par excellence*: character based, episodic, and temporally sequential. That this literary form spontaneously occurred in eighteenth century India, apparently independently of any European models, does make the text exceptional.

According to Ms. Hyder's foreword, *The Nautch Girl* was originally translated from Hasan Shah's 1790 "Hindi-ised Persian" text into Urdu by Sajjad Hussain Kasmandavi and serialized in the journal *Oudh Punch*. Soon thereafter, in 1893, it was published in Lucknow in book form. The original Persian text no longer exists. Although Ms. Hyder claims that she has been "strictly faithful to the [Urdu] text" and that she has "not anywhere modernised either the narrative or the dialogue," still her otherwise adequate translation of this very classical text slips at times into

careless and disrupting modern English colloquialisms. Witness: "After their retrenchment the troupe had been very despondent. But ever since they had started searching for a boat they had become quite hunky dory." Or: " 'So, I went haywire and wanted to kill myself.' " Still other passages are marred by incorrect grammar: one character, having gone to the bedside of the ailing Khanum Jan, "blowed" the Benediction of the Prophet on her face; earlier in the novel, a boat is praised for the fact that "it has fast speed." The responsibility for such glaring mistakes ultimately lies with the editors at Sterling Press. Especially in light of the fact that *The Nautch Girl* is proclaimed as the first novel of South Asia and is therefore of such obvious historical import, one feels that much more care should have been taken in the preparation of the translation.

Its privileged role as the first South Asian novel brings up another objection to Ms. Hyder's translation, and that is her decision to abridge the Urdu text. (It is also something of a shame that one can no longer observe the relationship Kasmandavi's Urdu translation bears to the lost Persian original.) In her foreword, Ms. Hyder states that she has "only cut down the ornate passages and [has] also omitted most of the *fazal* of Hafiz quoted in the narrative. . . ." She has "also shortened the lengthy love letters exchanged between the hero and the heroine." From the present reviewer's point of view, *The Nautch Girl* is far more intriguing as a literary historical artifact than it is as a diverting "page-turner" marketable to contemporary audiences. To sacrifice whole sections of the text in the attempt to make it somehow more "readable" is a judgment beyond the legitimate purview of Ms. Hyder's role as a translator. Her responsibility is to the text, not to her readership.

Taken as a document, *The Nautch Girl* becomes important when we consider some of the history that accompanies it. Originally composed in Persian in 1790, it seems to have languished in obscurity until Kasmandavi translated it into Urdu in 1893. Its reclamation by Kasmandavi near the turn of the twentieth century is remarkable, for only twelve years later we get what is generally recognized as the first novel composed in Urdu, i.e. Rurwa's *Umra's Jan Ada*. The similarities between *The Nautch Girl* and *Umra's Jan Ada* are immediately striking: both are stories that revolve around witty and refined courtesans, both fairly overflow with *fazal* and the urbane air of Lakhnawi culture, and both narratives find their motor force in a kind of asymptotic erotic approach to unattainable objects of desire. One is compelled to ask why *The Nautch Girl* was translated into Urdu when it was (indeed, why it was translated at all), what it might be about the turn of the twentieth century in

Lakhnavi society that called forth narrative structures that both assume the form of the novel and ground themselves thematically in the elegance and piquancy of courtesan culture.

On the surface of it, the several years in question seem to embody a deeply rooted social and cultural tension which is nonetheless productive in literary terms: on the one hand, there is the waxing of British colonialism and its attendant social technologies, and on the other hand there is the waning of the high Persianate culture emblematic of Mughal society. Judging from the contemporaneous appearance (in Urdu, at least) of these two novels, and looking at the central role desire plays in each, it seems as though desire itself gets caught up in this tension: thematic desire for an object redolent of familiar anxieties and assurances, and the irreversible form of desire desiring its own imperfect, constrained, and in this case, utterly new expression. When tracing the history of discourse on desire, all the way from Plato's *eros* to Freud's *libido*, we can observe the operation of a singularly important trope: the *pharmakon*. For Plato, the *pharmakon* was at the same time both that which remedies and that which poisons. Apropos of desire itself, we might formulate this as a strategic pun: *desire desires its own end*—it desires its own completion and fulfillment, in which case it is no longer desire, and so it also desires its own annihilation. Paradoxically, then, desire is a threat to itself. All this is of the essence of desire. If we may speak of the poetics of desire, we might then formulate the hypothesis that the contemporaneous appearance of these two Urdu novels bears historical witness to a shift or rupture in these poetics. Threatened by annihilation under the crushing weight of its own tradition, threatened by irrelevance in the face of an encroaching and inexorable constellation of new and disruptive social technologies that can do nothing but point out its weary romanticism, the classically expressed poetics of desire begin to give way to a newer and more epochally adequate form of expression, thereby allowing (or forcing) desire to project its familiar end, but as and within a new system of textual means. Threat remains the essence of desire, but desire is constrained to express (or at least point to) its end in ways that had been heretofore quite literally unthinkable. Several years after its advent, the works of Premchand mark the completion of this shift or rupture, betraying not only the new narrative technologies of expression, but also the rethinking of desire's end itself.

Obviously, this is a wide-sweeping hypothesis and cannot be substantiated on the basis of only two texts. The relationship between desire and narrative itself has yet to be explicitly investigated in this

context, and this would necessarily entail examining not only the advent of prose narratives like the novel and the short story, but also the situation of the *darwāza* at this time, the role of the drama in nineteenth-century Urdu, as well as more general and properly historical accounts of the north Indian cultural milieu. Clearly, much work remains to be done, but equally clearly, *The Nawab Girl* marks something much more significant than simply "a good read."

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Note: (R) indicates that the book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue;

() indicates that the entry is of some relevance to Urdu.*

Āj (Karachī), March–April 1991. Edited by Ajmal Kamal. 402 pp. Rs. 60/-.

[Special issue on Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Contents: translations of 8 stories; 2 entire novels (*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *No One Writes to the Colonel*); chapters from the novels *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*; a speech; an article; and articles on Marquez.]

Afkar (Karachi), Nos. 260–261 (Nov–Dec 1991). Edited by Muhammad Ali Siddiqi.

[Special issue on Ali Sardar Ja'fari—a poet, ardent proponent of Marxism in literature, and active leader in the Progressive Writers' Movement. Contents: biographical sketch; his latest writing, including, significantly, a poem "Al-vidā'" (Farewell [to Communism]) and an article "Kamūnizm ki Nā-kāmi" (Failure of Communism); photographs; personality assessment by, among others, Sibte Hasan and Ali Jawad Zaidi; poetry selections by Himayat Ali Sha'ir and Ashfaq Husain; critical pieces on his status as poet and critic by Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer, Wahid Akhtar, Jagan Nath Azad, etc.; selected articles by him; felicitation messages, impressions, and poetic tribute by contemporaries.]

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[The Urdu section of the journal (pp. 19–148) includes: fiction by Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Sa'adat Hassan Manto, Ghulam Abbas, Intizar Husain, and Khalida Husain; poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, N. M. Rashid, Meera Ji, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Majeed Amjad, Aziz Hamid Madani, and Munir Niazi; a "Conversation with Faiz Ahmed Faiz"; and a feature article on Abdullah Hussein by Guest Editor. The journal is published by The Pakistan Academy of Letters.] (R)

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[A dictionary of technical terms covering numerous disciplines, such as philosophy, history, sociology, education, law, science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology, biology, medicine, and engineering. The terms were prepared before Partition at Osmania University, Hyderabad (Deccan), for use in a very elaborate program of translations. The dictionary can be ordered from: National Language Authority, 16-D West, Blue Area, Islamabad, Pakistan.]

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Janaki Bai. See Tharu, Susie and Lalita, K., below.

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[Has a special section on Rashid Jahan (pp. 130-183), with the following material: 2 short stories, "Sightseeing Trip to Delhi," translated by Asad ur Rahman (pp. 130-132), "That One," translated by Khurshid Mirza (pp. 133-134); a play, "Woman: A One-Act Drama," translated by Steven M. Poulos; a reminiscence by Khurshid Mirza, "Rashid Jahan: My *APABI*" (pp. 152-157); *JSAL* "Interview with Dr. Hamida Saiduzzafar," Rashid Jahan's sister-in-law (pp. 158-165); and an article "Rashid Jahan: Urdu Literature's First 'Angry Young Woman' . . .," by Carlo Coppola and Sajida Zubair (pp. 166-183).]

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[Expected date of publication: November 1993; can be ordered

from: Mansell, Cassell Place, Stanley House, 3 Fleets Lane, Poole, Dorset, BH15 3AJ, England. FAX: 0202 666219.]

Malal, Saghir. Tr. *Bisim Sadat ke Sahkar Afiant* (Masterpiece Short Stories of the Twentieth Century). Karachi: Welcome Book Port Private Limited, 1991. 434 pp. Rs. 200/-.
[Urdu translations of 36 short stories by Russian, U.S., British, French, Czech, Irish, Argentine, Dutch, Mexican, Colombian, and Brazilian writers.]

Manto, Sa'adat Hasan. *Manjo-nama*, *Manjo-rana*, and *Manjo-numa*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1990, 1990, and 1991. 791, 954, and 774 pp. Rs. 400, Rs. 400, and Rs. 400.
[Three beautifully produced volumes, covering the greater part of Manto's literary output; unedited and without critical apparatus; a 4th volume is promised.]

———. "Sharda," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 22:2 (1987): 240–252.
[Short story; translated by Tahira Naqvi.]

Manuel, Peter. "The Popularization and Transformation of the Light-Classical Urdu *Ghazal*-Song." In Arjun Appadurai, et al., eds., *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 347–361.

Masud, Naiyer. *Tir-e Kafir* (The Essence of Camphor). Lucknow: Nusrat Publications, 1990. 191 pp. Rs. 30/-.
[Collection of 7 short stories by one of South Asia's leading fiction writers.]

Memon, Muhammad Umar. Ed. and tr. *The Colour of Nothingness: Modern Urdu Short Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Ltd., 1991. xxx, 194 pp. Rs. 65/-.
[Stories by: Zamiruddin Ahmad, Intizar Hussain, Khalida Husain, Abdullah Hussein, Qurratulain Hyder, Anwar Khan, Balraj Komal, Iqbal Majeed, Hasan Manzoor, Naiyer Masud, Muhammad Umar Memon, Ali Imam Naqvi, Surendra Prakash, Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman, Enver Sajjad, and Sharwan Kumar Verma; exhaustive introduction by the editor on the emergence and development of fiction in Urdu; notes on contributors. Available from Penguin

Books India Ltd., 84/146 Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110 019, India, and South Asia Books, P.O. Box 501, Columbia, MO 63105.]

- . Ed. *Domains of Fear and Desire: Urdu Stories*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1991. 164 pp. \$ 15.95.

[Stories by: Zamiruddin Ahmad, Qudratullah Shahab, Intizar Husain, Qurratulain Hyder, Abdullah Hussein, Naiyer Masud, Hasan Manzar, Khalida Husain, Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman, Jeelani Bano, Ram Lall, Parveen Sarwar, Ikramullah, Surender Parkash, Enver Sajjad, Balraj Manra, Muhammad Umar Memon, Anwer Khan, Asif Farrukhi, Muhammad Mansha Yad, and Salarn Bin Razzaq. The volume contains a short preface, glossary and notes, and brief introduction of contributing authors and translators. Available from TSAR Publications, P.O. Box 6996, Station A, Toronto M5W 1X7, Canada.]

- . Ed. *The Tale of the Old Fisherman: Contemporary Urdu Short Stories*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1991. 197 pp. \$10.00.

[Stories by: Zamiruddin Ahmad, Khalida Asghar, Masud Ashar, Saleem Asmi, Intizar Husain, Abdullah Hussein, Iqbal Majeed, Hasan Manzar, Muhammad Umar Memon, Surender Parkash, Muhammad Salimur Rahman, and Enver Sajjad; extensive introduction by the editor, photographs of authors; glossary; and notes on contributors. Available from Three Continents Press, 1901 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 407, Washington, D.C. 20006. Pakistani edition, *The Tale of the Old Fisherman and Other Contemporary Urdu Short Stories* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1992), Rs. 200/-.] (R)

- Minault, Gail. "Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and *Tahsib us-Niswan*: Women's Rights in Islam and Women's Journalism in Urdu." In Kenneth W. Jones, ed., *Religious Controversy in British India, Dialogues in South Asian Languages* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 179-199.

- . "Urdu Women's Magazines in the Twentieth Century," in *Manushi* 48 (1988): 2-9.

Mir, Mustansir. "Wordplay and Irony in Iqbal's Poetry," in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 3:1 (January 1992): 72-93.

Mirza, Khalid. "API," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 22:2 (1987): 129-139.

[Short story; translated by the author.]

Mirza, Sughra Humayun. See Tharu, Susie and Lalita, K., below.

"Mohammed Hanif interviews Abdullah Hussein," in *The Herald* (Karachi), January 1992, pp. 104-106.

Mukharjee, Sujit. "Indian Literature," in *New Quest* 82 (July-August 1990): 253-256.

[Review of *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Vol. 1, Amarendra Dutt, Chief Editor (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1987); takes issue with the editor regarding some Urdu entries.]

Naheed, Kishwar. *The Screams of an Illegitimate Voice*. Tr. Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Derek M. Cohen. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991. 166 pp. Rs.90/-.

[Selected poems.] (R)

Naim, C.M. "The Ghazal Itself: Translating Ghalib," in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 5:3 (1991): 219-33.

———. "Mughal and English Patronage of Urdu Poetry: A Comparison." In Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 259-276.

Narain, Govind. *Munshi Prem Chand*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978. 178 pp.

[Biography; discussion of Premchand's novels and short stories; selected bibliography.]

Pakistani Literature 1:1 (1992). See Iqbal, Muzaffar, above.

Pandey, Geetanjali. *Between Two Worlds: An Intellectual Biography of Premchand*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1989. 225 pp.

Pandey, Gyanendra. "In Defense of the Fragment: Writings about Hindu Muslim Riots in India Today," in *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992), pp. 37-55.

*Pandharipande, Rajeshwari. "Language of Religion in South Asia: The case of Hindi." In Edward C. Dimock, Jr., et al., eds., *Dimensions of Sociolinguistics in South Asia: Papers in Memory of Gerald Kelley* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1992), pp. 271-283.

Paul, Joginder. "The Spell." In Aruna Sitosh, ed., *Glimpses: The Modern Indian Short Story* (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1992), pp. 341-349.
[Short story; translated by Sudhir and Krishna Paul.]

Pegors, Mark. "A Shahrashob of Sauda," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 25:1 (1990): 89-97.
[A translation of Mirza Muhammad Rafi' Sauda's *Qasida-e Shahrashob*, with introduction and notes.]

Petievich, Carla R. "The Feminine Voice in the Urdu *Ghazal*," in *Indian Horizons* 39:1-2 (1990): 23-41.

———. "Poetry of the Declining Moghuls: The *Shahr Ashob*," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 25:1 (1990): 99-110.

Prakash, Surendra. "Dream Face," in *Chicago Review* 38:1-2 (1992): 34-41.
[Short story; translated by Aditya Behl and C.M. Naim.]

*Premchand, Munshi. "Mandir, Masjid," in *Indian Literature* 34:2 (1991): 67-80.
[Short story; translated by Rakhshanda Jalil from the original in Hindi.]

———. *Mangal Sutr*. Tr. Hasan Manzoor. Hyderabad (Pakistan): n. p., 1991. 53 pp. Rs. 20/-.
[Urdu translation of Premchand's last and unfinished novel; introduction by the translator; the book has no publisher, but can be ordered from: Sindh Psychiatric Clinic, College Road, Hirabad, Hyderabad (Sindh) - 71000, Pakistan.]

- . *Premchand ke Sam Afsanay*. New Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 1990. 924 pp. Rs. 280/-.
[100 short stories of the author selected and chronologically arranged by Prem Gopal Mittal; brief introduction; pen sketches and a photograph of the author.]
- Prichett, Frances W. *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastān of Amīr Hamzah*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. 372 pp.
[Introduction, pp. 1–57; translation, pp. 59–266.] (R)
- . "A Woman's Life: A Novel," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23:1 (1988): 247–252.
[Review of Qurratulain Hyder's novel *A Woman's Life* (New Delhi: Chetana Publications, 1979).]
- Rahman, Anisur. "Some Recent English Translations of Modern Urdu Poetry," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 24:2 (1989): 203–14.
- Rahman, Muhammad Salim-ur-. "Voices," in *Temenor* (London) 12 (1991): 171–177.
[Short story; translated by Muhammad Umar Memon.]
- Rahman, Tariq. "Critical Prejudices to Aspects of Partition Literature: Universal versus Ethnocentric Values," in *The Toronto South Asian Review* 11:1 (1992): 69–78.
- Rai, Amrit. *Premchand: His Life and Times*. Oxford University Press, 1992(?). £ 1.95.
- Ramanujan, A.K. Ed. *Folktales from India*. N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1992.
[Includes half a dozen Urdu folktales.]
- Ratan, Jai. Tr. *Contemporary Urdu Short Stories: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1991. 219 pp.
[Reasonably good translations of short fiction works by Premchand, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Rajindar Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, Mumtaz Mufti, Ismat Chughtai, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, Ghulam Abbas, Balwant Singh, Qurratulain Hyder, Ashfaq Ahmed, Intizar Hussain, Khalida Hussain, Ram Lal, Joginder Paul, Enver Sajjad,

Jeelani Bano, Harcharan Chawla, Surendra Prakash, Iqbal Majeed, Mansha Yad, Salaam Bin Razaq, Rasheed Amjad, Zahida Hina, Salim Agha Qazalbash, and Sultan Jamil Nasim.]

———. Tr. *Modern Urdu Short Stories*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1987. 200 pp. Rs. 80/-.

[Reasonably good translation of short fiction works by Premchand, Krishan Chander, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Rajindar Singh Bedi, Ghulam Abbas, Ismat Chughtai, Balwant Singh, Joginder Paul, Ram Lal, Qurratulain Hyder, Qazi Abdul Sattar, Satish Barra, Surendra Prakash, Rattan Singh, Jeelani Bano, Ghayas Ahmad Gaddi, Iqbal Majeed, Balraj Manra, Balraj Komal, Kalam Haidri.]

Razadan, R.M. "Urdu Ghazal and Faiz Ahmed Faiz," in *New Quest* 74 (March–April 1989): 123–126.

Razak, Salam Bin. "The Cow," in *Indian Literature* 34:5 (1991):63–72.
[Short story; translated by M.Q. Khan.]

Rege, M.P. "A Place for Every Language and Every Language in its Place," in *New Quest* 76 (July–August 1989): 195–196.
[Editorial about Hindi and Urdu language issue.]

Russell, Ralph. *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History*. London: Zed Books, 1992. 320 pp. £36.95, \$59.95 (cloth). £15.95, \$19.95 (paperback).

——— and Islam, Khurshidul. *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan*. Reprint. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. xiv, 290 pp. Rs. 190/-.

Sahir Ludhianvi. *Sorcery*. Tr. Sain Sucha. Sollentuna, Sweden: Vudya Kitabon Förlag, 1989. 114 pp.
[29 poems; bi-lingual text.]

Sain Sucha. Ed. *Search for Identity*. Sollentuna, Sweden: Vudya Kitabon Förlag, 1991. 264 pp.
[A collection of miscellaneous pieces resulting from "a meeting of writers of South Asia," which took place in Stockholm in September–October 1989. Entries in English and Urdu.]

Samiullah. *Fort Viham Kali, the Mughal's* (Fort William College, A Study).
Sultanpur: n.p., 1989. 228 pp. Rs. 45/-.

Sanzgiri, Jyotsna. "Poetry Worth Savoring," in *India Currents* 6:6
(September 1992): M20.
[Review of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *The Rebel's Silhouette*, tr. by Agha
Shahid Ali (Layton, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1991).]

Shackle, C. *Urdu Literature: A Bibliography*. London: School of Oriental
and African Studies, The University of London, revised edition,
1990.

— and Snell, Rupert. *Hindi and Urdu since 1800: A Common Reader*.
(SOAS South Asian Texts No. 1.) London: School of Oriental and
African Studies, The University of London, 1990. xvi, 222 pp.
£15.00.

Shah, Hasan. *Hasan Shah's The Nautch Girl: A Novel*. Tr. Qurratulain
Hyder. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1992. 104
pp. Rs. 45/-.
[Translation of the 1899 Urdu version of the 1790 original in
"Hindi-ised Farsi" called *Natkar* (Lancet); "the first known modern
Indian novel," according to Ms. Hyder. (R)]

Shaharyar. "Call from Above," in *Nimrod* (India: A Wealth of Diversity)
31:2 (1988): 107.
[Poem; translated by Muhammad Umar Memon.]

Shirin, Mumtaz. *Zulmat-e Nīm-rōz* (Darkness at Mid-day). Karachi: Nafls
Academy, 1990. 330 pp. Rs. 120/-.
[10 pieces, mostly short stories, and 3 articles by Muhammad
Hasan Askari, Intizar Hussain, and the late critic and creative writer
Mumtaz Shirin on communal riots that followed the partition of
India in 1947; highly informative introduction by Asif Farrakhi.]

Siddiqi, Safiya. *Pahl Nari kī Gunāh*. Lahore: Allied Publishing House,
1992. 152 pp. Rs. 70/-, £ 5.
[Short stories by a Pakistani woman writer residing in the U.K. The
stories deal with the problems of South Asian expatriates in British
society. Jacket blurb by Ralph Russell. Can be ordered from: Allied

Publishing House, Hasan Market, Herbhajan Das Street, Urdu Bazar, Lahore, Pakistan; Urdu Markaz, 28 Sackville Street, Piccadilly, London WC1 1DA, U.K.; Safia Siddiqi, 8 Tywford Abbey Road, London NW10 7HG, U.K.]

Sohail, Khalid. *Infrādt aur Mu'āssat Nafsiyāt* (Individual and Group Psychology). Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1991. 187 pp. Rs.75.

[A collection of 9 interviews and letters of the author—who is a practising psychiatrist—on the general subject of psychotherapy, written in an engaging literary style.]

———. *Talāt* (Search). Toronto: U&I Publishers, 1986. 172 pp. \$10.

[First collection of poems.]

*Suleri, Sara. "Karachi, 1990," in *Ravistan* 11:4 (1992): 50–71.

Tabassum, Wajeda. "Used Clothes." In Aruna Sineth, ed., *Glimpses: The Modern Indian Short Story* (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1992), pp. 351–357.

[Short story; translated by B.A. Farooqi.]

Tharu, Susie and Lalita, K. Eds. *Women Writing in India, 600 B.C. to the Present*. Vol. 1: 600 B.C. to the Early 20th Century. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1991. xxix, 537 pp. \$ 29.95.

[Urdu materials include: Mahlaqa Bai Chanda, "[Hoping to blossom (one day) into a flower]" (a poem by the famous Hyderabadī courtesan-poet of the late 18th and early 19th century), p. 122; Janaki Bai, "[I remember the days of love's first flowering]" (a *ghazal* by a tenoried dancer and singer of the early 20th century; "The only extant collection of her writings, *Diwan-e Janaki* [The Poems of Janaki] was published in 1931"), pp. 384–385; and Sughra Humayun Mirza, "[Who will care to visit my grave when I am gone]" (a poem by an activist and a prolific Hyderabadī writer [1884–1954], whose works "include several *safarnamas* or travel accounts, novels, short stories, poetry, and reformist writing"), pp. 379–380; all three admirably translated by Syed Sirajuddin; and Nazar Sajjad Hyder, "Purdah" (an essay offering a carefully reasoned argument against women's confinement behind *purdah*—a practice resulting in incalculable social and national waste;

translated by Vasantha Kannabiran and Rasheed Moosavi), pp. 392-393.]

Trivedi, Harish. "The Urdu Premchand: The Hindi Premchand." In Chandra Mohan, ed., *Aspects of Comparative Literature: Current Approaches* (New Delhi: India Publishers & Distributors, 1989), pp. 232-246.

Urdū Bungaku (Urdu Literature; Tokyo) 1 (May 1990); 2 (April 1991); 3 (November 1991); and 4 (August 1992).
[Presents Japanese translations of Urdu poetry, short stories, and articles.]

Zaheer, Sajjad. "Vision of Paradise," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 22:1 (1987): 185-188.
[Short story; translated by Munibur Rahman and Carlo Coppola.]

"Zaman Khan interviews Azra Abbas," in *Newsline* (Karachi), June 1991, pp. 130-133.

News & Events

I

"... [I]N OUR SOCIETY, there is so much polarity that every successive regime appoints its own historians and tries to rewrite history. In a situation like this, *the only true history of our age will be written in fiction*" (italics ours). —Abdullah Hussein, responding to a question by Zaman Khan during an interview.

*

Urdu scholars—but especially those among us who have often lamented the absence of a good Urdu-English dictionary in translating from Urdu and have had to make do with Plarr's outdated but still important work—will be pleased to know that Syed Yakoob Miran Mujtahedi of Hyderabad (Deccan) has recently completed work on his Urdu-English dictionary. Essentially a one-man undertaking, the project took 20 years to complete, with only Rs. 14,000/- coming in support from the Nizam's Charitable Trust. The salient features of the as yet unnamed dictionary, to be published by Orient Longman in possibly three volumes of a thousand pages each, are: (1) pronunciation of the Urdu entries in Roman script; (2) etymology and grammatical characteristics (such as gender and number) of every Urdu word; (3) illustrative sentences in Urdu along with English translations to indicate, wherever necessary, the nuances of a word; (4) non-English words and phrases, widely used in English, with their original and Anglicized pronunciation; (5) stylistic values of words (e.g., obsolete, archaic, slang, literary, poetic, etc.); and (6) equivalent English proverbs, where possible, for Urdu proverbs. The work also contains a large number of bureaucratic and administrative terms. Mr. Mujtahedi worked in the Translation Bureau of the Andhra Pradesh Government, retiring as Deputy Director of Translation in 1989.

*

The year seems to be especially propitious for Urdu lexicography. For two recent and indispensable entries, compiled and edited by Dr. Jameel Jalibi, see Bibliographic News in this issue.

Galimard of Paris has recently brought out a French translation of Ahmad Ali's celebrated *Twilight in Delhi*. A Spanish translation also appeared in 1991 (see Bibliographic News). A German translation is underway.

Edebiyat, A Journal of Middle Eastern and Comparative Literature, edited by William L. Hanaway and published by the Middle East Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, defunct for some time now, has been relaunched by Harwood Academic Publishers, Chur, Switzerland, with Julie Scott Meisami of Oxford University and Michael Beard of the University of North Dakota as Editors. Muhammad Umar Memon will continue to serve on the Editorial Board as a referee for Urdu materials. A future issue will carry a translation of the opening chapter of Intizar Husain's novel *Baat* by Frances W. Pritchett. If you have a piece that you would like considered for this publication, please send it to Muhammad Umar Memon at:

University of Wisconsin
Department of South Asian Studies
1210 Linden Drive
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Urdu Bungaku (a journal devoted to translation of Urdu literature into Japanese) has been launched by the Urdu Society, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, with Professor Takeshi Suzuki as editor. Four issues have come out to date. (See Bibliographic News.)

The Triangle South Asia Consortium, in association with the Independent Scholars of South Asia (ISOSA), sponsored an all-day symposium on "The State and Popular Participation in Community Activities" at North Carolina State University on February 11, 1992. The following papers were presented in the opening panel: Gail Minault (University of Texas), "The Patronage Puzzle: British Patronage and Vernacular Education in North India in the Late 19th Century"; Geeta Patel (University of Iowa), "Miraji's Essays: Transforming the Urdu Canon"; and Carla Patievich (University of British Columbia), "Heroes, *Virakhins*, and Gender-

Bending: Historicizing the Urdu *Ghazal*." Sandria B. Freitag (University of California) chaired the panel and David Gilmartin (North Carolina State University) discussed the papers.

The Center for South Asia Studies, University of California at Berkeley, held its Sixth Annual South Asia Conference on February 22–23, 1992. In the art and literature panel, both Carla Petievich (University of British Columbia) and Laurel Steele (University of Chicago) presented papers on Urdu poetry which provoked lively discussion.

The Ninth Annual Spring Symposium, sponsored by Center for South Asian Studies, University of Hawaii, took place March 5–7, 1992. This year's topic: "Other Voices, Other Views: Anti-Hegemonic Discourse in South Asia." Papers relevant to Urdu were presented by: Lubna Chaudhry, "Creating New Worlds, Expressing Old Realities: The Poetry of Kishwar Naheed and Parveen Shakir"; Arifa Farid, "Feminist and Anti-Feminist Trends in Urdu Literature"; and Gail Minault, "Other Voices Other Rooms: The View from the *Zanaana*."

The Urdu Literary Society of Montreal held a conference on "Western Influences on Urdu" on May 22–24, 1992 on the Loyola Campus of Concordia University, Montreal. Participants included, among others: Sheila McDonough, Carla Petievich, M.H.K. Qureshi, Khalid Sohail, A.Q. Zia (Canada); Qamar Rais (Delhi, India); Mushtaq Ahmad (Sweden); Mohsin Ehsan, Siddiq Javed (Pakistan); Muhammad Umar Memon, Frances Pritchett (USA). The Conference concluded with a *mudaf'ina* (poetry reading) in which, in addition to a number of Canadian and US Urdu poets, Muhsin Bhopali, Ahmad Fraz, and Arif Abdul Mariri from Pakistan also participated. The Conference was organized by Dr. Shafiq Alvi, who is a professor of Economics.

The following papers were presented at the 45th Annual Seminar of the Department of South Asia Regional Studies, the University of Pennsylvania, on Language, Literature and Society in South Asia: Peter Gaeffke: "Newspapers in Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi" (November 4, 1992); C.M. Naim: "Transvestic Words: Some Comments on Urdu Rekhti" (January 10, 1993); and Frances Pritchett: "A Garden in the Falk Azad, the Victorians and the Power of Time" (January 13, 1993).

Famous Urdu novelist and winner of the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award

Qurratulain Hyder spent part of May and June 1992 in the US and gave readings from her latest novel *Candor Begam* in a number of literary meetings sponsored by the South Asian expatriate community in Cincinnati, Boston, New York, etc.

David Matthews of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, informs us that his translation of Shaukat Siddiqi's novel *Xada ki Baris* "has recently been published by Paul Nurbury Publications, Sandfold, Folkestone, Kent, UK." (This item couldn't be included in the Bibliographic News for insufficient information.) In a recent letter, Dr. Matthews writes that he has just completed a book on Iqbal (text, translation, and commentary) which is now ready for the press. Another book, which concerns *nazms*, is in the last stages of preparation, and a third, which is a "self-indulgent anthology of Urdu verse in translation," is in press in Delhi. Dr. Matthews is planning to visit the US in July, and would like "to meet as many 'Urdu' people as possible." If interested in inviting Dr. Matthews to your campus, contact him at soas, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1N 0XG.

Ralph Russell informs us that he is preparing an Urdu translation of his recently published *Pursuit of Urdu Literature*. Also: "I have to check and finalise with the translator the translation of Marion Molreno's stories which are being published in Urdu in Pakistan; and I also have an anthology of Urdu literature in English translation to prepare for a publisher here." These activities prevented him from preparing and sending the AUS "the translation of the transcript of my conversation with Ismat Chughtai in 1965."

The following men of letters passed away: (1991) Saba Akbarabadi, Anwar Enayetullah, Zoe Ansari, Hasan Naim, Aziz Hamid Madani, and Maikash Akbarabadi; (1992) Akhtar Husain Raipuri, Mumtaz Hussain, Sajjad Baqir Rizvi, and Kumar Pashi.

Saba Akbarabadi was a poet and distant relative of Ghalib, and died in Islamabad at the age of 83. Anwar Enayetullah, who died on November 30 in Karachi at the age of 66, was a short-story writer; however, he was better known as a translator of Urdu short stories into English, and a literary and TV columnist. Zoe Ansari was a connoisseur of classical Urdu literature, a journalist, and a translator who lived for many years in the Soviet Union, translating many Russian classics into Urdu. Akhtar

Husain Raipuri, who died at the age of 80 in Karachi, was the first Marxist critic in Urdu. His 1935 article "Adab aur Zindagi" was an explication of his Marxist views on literature. Among his many languages were Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, and French. Mumtaz Husain, critic and author, was a well known proponent of progressive ideology in literature. In addition to studies on Khusrav and Ghalib, he produced several collections of critical essays. He died in Karachi at the age of 75. Kumar Pashi was a significant modernist poet who lived in Delhi.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, distinguished Urdu critic, spent the month of April (1993) at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, where he is adjunct professor of Urdu at South Asia Regional Studies Center.

The following received awards: Majruh Sultanpuri (Iqbal Award, given by the Madhya Pradesh Government); Ali Sardar Jafri (Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Award, given by the U.P. Urdu Academy); Gyan Chand Jain (cash award of Rs. 10,000/-, given by the U.P. Urdu Academy, for his lifetime literary achievements, which he refused); Rashid Hasan Khan (cash award of Rs. 25,000/-, given by the Delhi Urdu Academy, for his research work); Malik Ram (Hali Award for 1992); and Iqbal Majeed (cash award of Rs. 11,000/-, given by Madhya Pradesh Urdu Academy).

II

—*The following, originally put out by the Center for Research Libraries, was submitted by James Nye from the University of Chicago.*

DATE: September 16, 1992 *Revised*
For more information, contact
Linda Naru (312) 955-4545 ext. 318

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES has awarded a grant of \$140,000 to the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) on behalf of the South Asia Microform Project (SAMP) to improve access to 2,800 nineteenth century Hindustani books held in the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collections. The project will include the microfilming of the volumes for preservation and wider dissemination to scholars and the creation of machine readable cataloging that will be added to CRL's bibliographic file and to the OCLC and RLIN bibliographic

databases.

The increased accessibility that will be achieved through this project is particularly important to scholars in the United States because collections here have been built mostly since 1960, and lack extensive holdings of earlier published works in the modern regional languages of Southern Asia. The preservation of these titles is important because of the fragile condition of the original volumes.

During the project period, October 1991 through December 1994, a panel of South Asian scholars in fields of history, literature, linguistics, folklore, and religious studies will select the titles and editions from the *Hindustani Section of the Catalogue of the Library of the India Office* within the subject areas "Arts and Sciences," "History and Geography," and "Literature."

The selected titles will be microfilmed at photoduplication facilities of the British Library. Master negatives will be retained by the British Library under their copyright, and a positive service copy of each reformatted title will be deposited into CRL's collection. All titles produced in the project will be freely available to CRL members and SAMP participants and to non-CRL members according to the existing policy.

Principle Investigator for the project is Donald B. Simpson, CRL President. James H. Nye, Bibliographer for Southern Asia at the University of Chicago Library, is the Academic Coordinator who will guide the selection of materials to be microfilmed.

The Center for Research Libraries, founded in 1949, is the nation's oldest cooperative, membership-based research library. The Center's mission is to make available to the library community research materials that are rarely-held in North American Libraries. In working toward this goal, the Center acquires, preserves, provides bibliographic access to and lends from its collections. These collections, comprised of more than 3.7 million volumes and 1.1 million units of microfilm, are housed in Chicago and include newspapers, dissertations, archival materials, scientific and technical serials and monographs, area studies microforms and special collections. Center membership consists of 130 university, college and research libraries throughout the United States and Canada.

The South Asia Microform Project (SAMP) was established in 1987, at CRL following five years of efforts by the South Asia Microform and Library Committee of the Association for Asian Studies. SAMP's purpose is to acquire microform copies of research materials relating to India, Pakistan,

Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. SAMP is administered by CRL and governed by twenty-six institutional members.

III

—The following is an e-mail message sent by David Magier of Columbia University.

Arabic/Persian/Urdu Optical Character Recognition (OCR)

Below is from an article in *MacWeek* (7/13/92, p. 18), which appears as a sidebar to a major article on optical character recognition software for the Macintosh from CTA Inc. (25 Science Park, New Haven, Connecticut 06511; phone: (203) 786-5828, fax: 786-5833). Everyone has always said, as a prime example of the weakness of OCR technology, that it would be YEARS before anyone managed to come up with OCR software that would recognize Arabic. But now that it exists, it opens all sorts of possibilities for text analysis of Arabic/Urdu/Persian poetry, digital text storage and retrieval, e-text archives (available by ftp) in each of these languages, etc., etc. Of course the software isn't cheap, but it's certainly cheap enough to make librarians and scholars stop and consider it for possible projects that could benefit us all. . . . (By the way, I have no affiliation with CTA, and no direct knowledge of the software described, other than the article that I'm passing along below. Hope you find it as intriguing as I do. —David

CTA makes first foray into Arabic recognition

CTA Inc. has announced a new version of its OCR software that the company said provides the first omnifont recognition of Arabic text.

TextPert Arabic, available now for \$1,495, recognizes documents ranging from 10 to 72 points in several typeset Arabic script styles and fonts, including Persian and Urdu. It can capture Arabic text at a rate of 2,500 characters per minute, CTA said. It also handles 32 Indo-European languages and can recognize pages containing Arabic and non-Arabic alphabets in separate text blocks.

Like the Indo-European version, TextPert Arabic lets users specify text blocks to recognize and supports batch processing of TIFF files. A version of the program also is available with CTA's TextPert High Speed

RISC board for \$5,995.

The program comes with Arabic and English software and documentation.

According to CTA, TextPert Arabic was created at the request of Apple Europe, which helped fund the project and is offering the product through European dealers. CTA said its contract with Apple stipulates that TextPert Arabic will be available exclusively on the Mac for an undisclosed period of time.

NOTE: If you have read a paper or published an item or know of a piece of information of interest to Urdu-wallahs, please do not hesitate to send it to us for inclusion in the next issue of the *AUS*. —Editors

Notes on Contributors

ZAMRUDDIN AHMAD, a highly regarded Urdu fiction writer, died in London in 1991; *Sākʿi Sāvan*, his first collection of short stories, appeared posthumously.

TANVIR ANJUM has a doctorate in linguistics from the University of Texas and teaches English in Karachi. Her first collection of poems, *An-Dikʿi Labrāʾi*, came out in 1982.

CARLO COPPOLA is a professor at Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan. He has translated numerous poems and short stories from Urdu and is now working on a critical book on Ahmed Ali.

GRIFFITH A CHAUSSEÉ holds Master's degrees in South Asian Studies and Comparative Literature and is currently working toward a Ph.D. in Urdu literature.

ISMAT CHUGHTAI (see Tahira Naqvi's "Ismat Chughtai—A Tribute" elsewhere in this issue).

VINAY DHARWAKER teaches English at the University of Oklahoma; he contributed a special section of modern Hindi and Marathi poems to the Winter 1989–90 issue of *TriQuarterly*.

ASIF FARRUKHI teaches health sciences at the Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan. He has published three collections of short stories, numerous book reviews, translations, and critical essays.

ALAMGIR HASHMI teaches English and Comparative Literature at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. He also writes poetry and has

published five collections to date, the latest being *Sun and Moon and Other Poems*.

SARVAT HUSAIN teaches Urdu at a college near Hyderabad, Pakistan. So far he has published one collection of poems.

AJMAL KAMAL makes his home in Karachi where he works at the National Development Finance Corporation and edits the quarterly avant garde journal *Āj*.

DAVID LELTVELD taught Indian history for a number of years at the University of Minnesota and is currently Dean of Students at Columbia University.

DAVID MATTHEWS teaches Urdu at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

MIRAJI (1912–1949): an unconventional poet who inaugurated the modernist phase in Urdu poetry.

MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON is professor of Urdu and Islamic Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

C.M. NAIM, the founder and former editor of *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, is a senior scholar of Urdu humanities and teaches at the University of Chicago.

TAHIRA NAQVI is an adjunct professor of English at Western Connecticut State University and co-translator of *The Quilt and Other Stories* by Ismat Chughtai.

GRETA PATEL, who is finishing a doctorate at Columbia University on the Urdu poet Miraji, currently holds an administrative job at the University of Iowa.

CARLA PETREVICH teaches history at Montclair State College, New Jersey, and is a Senior Research Scholar at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, where she is currently working on South Asian Arts in the Diaspora.

FRANCES W. PRITCHETT teaches Urdu and Hindi at Columbia University.

She has contributed substantial scholarship to classical Urdu lyric poetry (*ghazal*) and romance (*dāstān*). See elsewhere in this issue for a review of her latest publication *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dāstān of Amr Hamzah*.

M. SALIM-UR-RAHMAN—poet, critic, short story writer, and translator—lives a hermetic life in Lahore devoted to the pursuit of literature.

ZISHAN SAHEL has so far published two collections of poetry, a few pieces of criticism and some fiction and translations.

SAIDUDDIN teaches Urdu in Karachi; currently he is putting together his first book of poems.

AFZAL AHMAD SAYYID is an entomologist working for the Federal Plant Protection Department in Karachi, Pakistan. He has published three collections of poems and has translated from, among others, Jean Genet and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

SARA SHAGUFTAH lived a brief, intense and controversial life. Her first collection of Punjabi poems was published in India by Amrita Pritam. Her Urdu collection, which represents only a fraction of her sizable poetic output, was published posthumously.

PARVEEN SHAKIR is a civil servant with Pakistan Customs, a noted poet, and a recipient of many literary awards. She spent the 1990–91 academic year as a Fulbright Consortium Scholar at St. Joseph's College and Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

کالی چڑیا

پنجرا خالی تھا
اور تمھاری کھڑکی میں رکھا ہوا گلدان
سفید پھولوں سے بھر چکا تھا
کتابوں کی دکان میں
نظموں کی نئی کتاب آچکی تھی
اور اسٹیشن پر ٹریں
کہیں جانے کے لیے تیار کھڑی تھی۔
پنجرا خالی تھا
اور کالی چڑیا
ٹریں کے آگے آگے از رہی تھی
ایک سُرنگ سے باہر نکلتے ہی
انجی نے چیخ ماری
میں نے کھڑکی سے باہر دیکھا
خواب میری آنکھوں میں کھر بنا چکے تھے
اور پنجرا خالی تھا۔

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SARVAT HUSAIN
AJMAL KAMAL
DAVID LELYVELD
D.J. MATTHEWS
MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON
MIRAJI
C.M. NAIM
TAHIRA NAQVI
GEETA PATEL
CARLA PETIEVICH
FRANCES W. PRITCHETT
JOHN ROOSA
ZISHAN SAHIL
SA'IDUDDIN
MUHAMMAD SALIM-UL-RAHMAN
AFZAL AHMAD SAYYID
SARA SHAGUFTAH
PARVEEN SHAKIR